

SONS OF FIRE

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SONS OF FIRE

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BY THE AUTHOR OF
"LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," "VIXEN,"
"ISHMAEL," ETC.

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CONTENTS OF VOL. III.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. ROMAN AND SABINE	1
II. "IF SHE BE NOT FAIR TO ME"	20
III. "I GO TO PROVE MY SOUL"	33
IV. BLACK AND WHITE	48
V. THE MEETING-PLACE OF WATERS	73
VI. KIGAMBO	102
VII. MAMBU KWA MUNGU	125
VIII. WHERE THE BURDEN IS HEAVIEST	147
IX. ALL IN HONOUR	163
X. "AM I HIS KEEPER?"	176
XI. A SHADOW ACROSS THE PATH	188
XII. "IT IS THE STARS"	207
XIII. MADNESS OR CRIME?	236
XIV. "HE HATH AWAKENED FROM THE DREAM OF LIFE"	249

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SONS OF FIRE.



CHAPTER I.

ROMAN AND SABINE.

GEOFFREY was not to be baulked of his purpose. He sat till long after midnight in the music-room with his mother—sat or roamed about in the ample spaces of that fine apartment, talking in his own wild way, with that restless, fitful romanticism which had marked him from childhood, from the dim hours, so vaguely remembered and so sadly sweet in his memory, when he had sat on the floor with his head leaning against the soft silken folds of her gown, and had been moved to tears by her playing. There were simple turns of melody, almost automatic phrases of Mozart's, which

recalled the vague heartache of those childish hours; an idea of music so interwoven with that other idea of summer twilight in a spacious, shadowy room, that it startled him to hear one of those familiar movements in the broad glare of day, as if daylight and *that* music were irreconcilable.

No arguments of his mother's could shake his purpose.

"I will see her and talk with her. She alone shall be the judge of what is right. Perhaps when I am sure of her I may be able to teach myself patience. But I must be sure of her love."

He was at Bournemouth by the first train that would carry him there, and it was still early when he went roaming out towards Branksome and the borderland of Dorset. To walk suited better with his impatience than to be driven by a possibly stupid flyman, and to have the fly pulled up every five minutes for the stupid flyman to interrogate a—probably—more stupid pedestrian, who would inevitably

prove "a stranger in those parts," as if the inhabitants never walked abroad.

No, he would find Rosenkrantz, Mrs. Tolmash's villa, for himself. He had been told it was near Branksome Chine.

Swift of foot and keen of apprehension, he succeeded in less time than any flyman would have done. Yes, this was the villa—red-brick, gabled, curtained with virginia creeper from chimneys downwards; virginia creeper not yet touched by autumn's ruddy fingers; and with roses enough climbing over the verandah and surrounding the windows to justify the name which fancy had given. He opened the light iron gate and went into the garden; a somewhat spacious garden. She was there, perhaps. At any rate, he would explore before confronting servant, drawing-room, and unknown lady of the house. The garden was so pretty, and the morning was so fine, that, if within the precincts, surely she would be in the garden.

He went boldly round the house by a

shrubberied walk, and saw a fine lawn on a breezy height above the Chine, facing the sunlit sea and the wooded dip that went down to golden sands. The standard rose-trees were blown about in the morning air, dropping a rain of pink and yellow on the smooth short turf. He saw the sea westward—sapphire blue—through an arch of reddest roses, and beyond that archway, close to the edge of the cliff, as it seemed in the perspective, there was a bench with a red and white awning, and sitting under that awning a figure in a white frock, a slender waist, a graceful throat, a small dark head, which he would have known from a thousand girlish heads and throats and waists—for him the girl of girls.

He knew that restless foot, lightly tapping the grass as she looked seaward. Was there not weariness of life, rebellion against fate, in that quick movement of the slender foot? Was she not waiting for happiness and for him?

He ran to her, sat down by her side, had taken both her hands in his, before she could utter so much as a cry of surprise.

“My darling, my darling!” he murmured;
“now and for ever my own!”

She snatched her hands away and started to her feet indignantly. Anger flashed in the dark eyes and flushed the pale olive cheeks. And then her frown changed to an ironical smile, and she stood looking at him almost contemptuously.

“I think you forget, Mr. Wornock, that it is a long time since the Romans ran away with the Sabines.”

“You mean that I am too impetuous.”

“I mean that you are too absurd.”

“Is it absurd to love the sweetest woman in the world—the prettiest, the most enchanting? Suzette, I tore back from the Hartz Mountains because I was told you were free—free to marry the man who loves you with all the passion of his soul. When I told you of my love months ago, you were bound to another man, you were obstinately bent upon keeping your promise to him. I had no option but to withdraw, to fight my battle, and try to live without you. I did

try, Suzette. I left the ground clear for my rival. I was self-banished from my own home."

"You need not have been banished. I could have kept away from Discombe."

"That would have distressed my mother, whose happiness depends on your society, Suzette. You know how she loves you. To see you my wife will make her very happy. She has taken you to her heart as a daughter."

"Not so much as she has taken Allan Carew to her heart. It was for his sake she liked me. I could see when we parted that it was of Allan she thought; it was for him she was sorry. I don't think she will ever forgive me for making Allan unhappy."

"Not if her only son's happiness is bought with that price? Suzette, why do you keep me at arm's length—now, when there is nothing to part us; now, while I know that you love me?"

"You have no right to say that. If you know it, you know more than I know myself."

“ Suzette, Suzette, do you deny your love ? ”

She was crying, with her hands over her averted face. He tried to draw those hands away, eager to look into her eyes. He would not believe mere words. Only in her eyes could he read the truth.

“ I deny your right to question me now, while my heart is aching for Allan—Allan whom I like and respect more than any man living. He is the best friend I have in the world, after my father. He will always be my cherished and trusted friend. If in some great unhappiness I needed any other friend than my father—badly, wickedly as I have behaved to him—it is to Allan I would go for help.”

“ What, not to me ? ”

“ To you ! No more than I would appeal to a whirlwind.”

“ You think me so unreasonable a creature ? ”

“ Yes, unreasonable ! It is unreasonable in you to come here to-day. You must know that I am sorry for having behaved so badly—deeply sorry for Allan’s disappointment.”

“I begin to think it a pity you disappointed him, if nobody is to profit by your release. Oh, forgive me, forgive me! I should have killed myself if you had persisted. At least you have saved a life. I hope you are glad of that.”

“I cannot talk to you while you are so foolish.”

“Is it foolish to tell you the truth? I bare my heart to you—to the woman I want for my wife. I am a creature full of faults; but for you I could become anything. I would be as wax, and you might mould me into whatever shape you chose. Oh, Suzette, is not love enough? Is it not enough for any woman to be loved as I love you?”

“You cannot love me better than Allan did, though he never talked as wildly as you.”

“Allan! It is not in his nature to love or to suffer as I do. He was not born under the same burning star. All the forces of nature were at war when I was born, Suzette. My Swiss nurse told me of the tempest that was roaring over the wilderness of peaks and crags

when I came into the world, with something of that storm in my heart and brain. Be my good genius, Suzette. Save me from my darker, stormier self. Make and mould me into an amiable, order-loving English gentleman. I am your slave. You have but to command me, and I shall submit as meekly as the trained dog who lies down at his mistress's feet and shams the stillness of death. Tell me to fetch and carry; tell me to die. I will do your bidding like that dog."

She gave a troubled sigh and looked at him, pale and perplexed, in deep distress. His pleading moved her as no words of Allan's had ever done, and yet there was more of fear than of love in the emotion that he awakened.

"I have only one thing in the world to ask of you," she said, in a low, agitated voice. "I ask you to leave me to myself. I came here, almost among strangers, in order that I might be calm and quiet, and away from the associations of the past year. You must forgive me,

Mr. Wornock, if I say that it was cruel of you to follow me to this refuge."

"Cruel for passionate love to follow the beloved! 'Mr. Wornock,' too! How formal! Suzette, if you do not love me, if I am nothing to you, why did you jilt Carew?"

"I asked him to release me because I felt I did not love him well enough to be his wife."

"Only that?"

"Only that. As time went on, I felt more and more acutely that I could not give him love for love."

"And you cared for no one else?—there was no other reason?" he insisted, trying to take her hand.

"I have hardly asked myself that question; and I will not be questioned by you."

She rose and moved away, he following.

"Mr. Wornock, I am going into the house. I beg you not to persecute me. It was persecution to come here to-day."

"Give me hope. I cannot leave you without hope."

“I can say nothing more than I have said. My heart is sore for Allan. Allan is first in my thoughts, and must be for a long time. I hate myself for having behaved so badly to him.”

“And what of your behaviour to me? How cold! how cruel!”

“Oh, thank Heaven, here come Mrs. Tolmash and her daughter. Now you *must* go.”

Geoffrey looked round and saw a middle-aged lady in a chair being wheeled across the lawn, a girl in a pink frock pushing the chair.

He gave Suzette a despairing look, picked up his hat from the grass, and walked quickly away. He was in no mood to make the acquaintance of the pink frock or the lady in the chair, though that plump, benevolent person, with neat little grey curls clustering round a fair forehead, looked quite capable of asking him to luncheon.

He walked back to the nearest station, angry beyond measure, and paced the platform for an hour, waiting for the train for Eastleigh, and with half a mind to throw himself under the

first express that came shrieking by. Yet that were basest surrender.

“She is possessed by a devil of obstinacy,” he told himself. “But the stronger devil within me shall master her.”

While the more fiery and arrogant of Suzette’s lovers was raging against her coldness, resolved to bear down all opposing forces, to ride roughshod over every obstacle, her gentler and more conscientious lover was hiding his grief in the quiet of that level and unromantic land on which his eyes had first opened. No tempest had raged when Allan was born. He had entered life amidst no grandeurs of mountain and glacier, arrested avalanche and roaring torrent. An English home — English to intensity — had been his cradle; a mild, even-tempered mother, a father in whom a gentle melancholy was the prevailing characteristic. Growing up under such home-influences, Allan Carew had something of womanly gentleness interwoven with the

strong fibre of a fine manly nature. He had the womanly capacity to suffer in silence, to submit to Fate, and to take a very humble place at the banquet of life.

Well, he was not destined to be happy. She had never loved him—never. He had won her by sheer persistency; he had imposed upon her yielding nature, upon the amiability which makes it so hard for some women to say no. She had always been friendly and kind and sweet, but the signs and tokens of passionate love had been wanting. If she would have been content to marry him upon those friendly terms, content to forego the glamour of romantic love, all might have been well. Love would have followed marriage in the quiet years of domestic life. The watchful kindnesses of an adoring husband must have won her heart.

Yes, but for Geoffrey Wornock's appearance on the scene, all might have been well. Suzette would have married Allan, and the years would have ripened friendship into love. Geoffrey's

was the fatal influence. Contrast with that fiery nature had made Allan seem a dullard.

This is what the forsaken lover told himself as he roamed about the autumn fields, the fertile levels, where all the soil he trod on was his own, and had belonged to his ancestors when the clank of armed feet was still a common thing in the land, and a stout Suffolk pad was your swiftest mode of travel. The shooting had begun, and the houses of Suffolk were full of guests, and the squires of Suffolk had mustered their guns, and were doing their best to beat the record of last year and all the years that were gone. But Allan had no heart for so much as a morning tramp across the stubble. The flavour and the freshness were gone out of life. He gave his shooting to a neighbour, an old friend of his father's, while his own days were dawdled through in the library, or spent in long walks by stream and mill-race, pine-wood and common, in any direction that offered the best chance of solitude.

He wrote to Suzette, with grave kindness,

apologizing for his angry vehemence in the hour of their parting. He expatiated sorrowfully upon that which might have been.

“I think I must have known all along that you had no romantic love for me,” he wrote; “but I would have been more than content to have your liking in exchange for my passionate love. I should not have thought myself a loser had you put the case in the plainest words. ‘You idolize me, and I—well—I think you an estimable young man, and I have no objection to be your idol, accepting your devotion, and giving you a sisterly regard in exchange.’ There are men who would think that a bad bargain; but I am not made of such proud stuff. Your friendship would have been more precious to me than any other woman’s love; and I should have been happy, infinitely happy, could I have won you on those terms.

“But it was not to be—and now my heart turns cold every time the post-bag is opened, lest it should contain the letter that will tell me Geoffrey Wornock has won the prize that

I have lost. Such things must be, Suzette. They are happening every day, and hearts are breaking, quietly. May you be happy—my dear lost love—whatever I may be.”

Much as he might desire solitude, it was impossible for Allan to escape his fellow-man through the month of September in such a happy shooting-ground as that in which his property lay. In that part of Suffolk people knew of hunting as a barbarous form of sport somewhat affected in the midlands, and a fox was considered a beast of prey. The guns had it all their own way in those woods which Allan's great-grandfather had planted, and over the turnips which Allan's tenants had sown. Among the shooters who were profiting by his hospitality it was inevitable that he should meet some one he knew; and that some one happened to be a man with whom he had been on the friendliest terms five years before during a big shoot in the neighbourhood.

They met at a dinner at the house of the jovial squire to whom Allan had given his shooting—

a five-mile drive from Fendyke. Lady Emily had persuaded her son to accept the invitation.

His father had been dead six months. Though she, the widow, would go nowhere, it might seem churlish in the son to hold himself aloof from old friends.

“And you don’t want to be wearing the willow for that shallow-hearted girl, I hope,” added Lady Emily, who was very angry with Suzette.

No, he did not want to wear the willow, to pose as a victim, so he accepted Mr. Meadowbank’s invitation.

It was to be only a friendly dinner, only the house party; and among the house party Allan found his old acquaintance, Cecil Patrington, a man who had spent the best years of his life in Africa, and had won renown among sportsmen as a hunter of big game, a weather-beaten athlete, brawny, strong of limb, with bronzed forehead and copper-coloured neck.

“I think you were just back from Bechuana Land when we last met,” said Allan, in the unreserve of Squire Meadowbank’s luxurious

smoke-room, "and you were going back to the Cape when the shooting was over. Have you been in Africa ever since?"

"Yes, I have been moving about most of the time, here and there, mostly in Central South Africa, between Brazzaville and Tabora, now on one side of the lake, now on the other?"

"Which lake?"

"Tanganyika. It's a delightful district, only it's getting a deuced deal too well known. Burton was a glorious fellow, and he had a glorious career. No man can ever enjoy life in Africa like that. There are steamers on the lake now, and one meets babies in perambulators, genuine British babies!" with a profound sigh.

"I have looked for a record of your exploits at the Geographical."

"Oh, I don't go in for that kind of thing, you see. I read a paper once, and it didn't pay. I am not a literary cove like Burton, and I haven't the gift of the gab like Stanley—who

is a literary cove, too, by the way. I ain't a scientific explorer. I don't care a hang what becomes of the water, don't you know. I like the lakes for their own sake—and the niggers for their own sake—and the picturesqueness of it all, and the variety, and the danger of it all. If I discovered a new lake or an unknown forest, I should keep the secret to myself. That's my view of Africa. I ain't a geographer. I ain't a missionary. I ain't a trader. I like Africa because it's jolly, and because there ain't any other place in the world worth living in for the man who has once been there."

"Shall you ever go again?"

"Shall I ever?" Mr. Patrington laughed at the question. "I sail for Zanzibar next November."

"Do you?" said Allan. "I should like to go with you."

"Why not?" asked Mr. Patrington.

CHAPTER II.

“ IF SHE BE NOT FAIR TO ME.”

GEOFFREY WORNOCK went back to Discombe, and his mother read failure and mortification in his gloomy countenance; but he vouchsafed no confidence. He was not sullen or unkind. He lived; and that was about as much as could be said of him. The fiddles, which were to him as cherished friends, lay mute in their cases. He seemed to regard that spacious music-room with its lofty ceiling and noble capacity for sound, as the captive lion regards his cage—a place in which to roam about, and pace to and fro, restless, miserable, unsatisfied. He did not complain, and his mother dared not attempt to console. Once she pressed his hand and

whispered “patience;” but he only shook his head fretfully, and walked out of the room.

“Patience! yes,” he muttered to himself. “I could be patient, as patient as Jacob when he waited for Rachel—if I were sure she loved me. But I have begun to doubt even that. Oh, if she knew what love meant, she would have rushed into my arms. She would have swooned upon my breast in the shock of that meeting; but she sat prim and quiet, only a little pale and tearful, while I was shaken by a tempest of passion. She is capable of no more than a schoolgirl’s love—held in check by the pettiest restraints of good manners and the world’s opinion—and she has hardly decided whether that feeble flame burns for me or for Allan.”

And then he began to preach to himself the sermon which almost every slighted swain has preached since the world began. What was this woman that he should die of heart-ache for her? Was she so much fairer than other women whom he might have for the wooing?

No, again and again, no. He could conjure fairer faces out of the past—faces he had gazed at and praised, and which had left him cold. She was not as handsome as Miss Simpson, at Simla, last year—that Miss Simpson who had thrown herself at his head—or as Miss Brown at Naini Tal, General Brown's daughter, who looked liked a *houri*, and who waltzed like a thing of air, imparting buoyancy and grace to the lumpiest of partners. He had not cared a straw for Miss Brown, even although the General had hinted to him, in the after-dinner freedom of the mess-room, that Miss Brown had an exalted opinion of him. No, he had cared for neither of these girls, though either might have been his for the asking. Perhaps that was why he did not care. He was madly in love with Suzette, whom he had known only as another man's betrothed. Suzette represented the unattainable; and for Suzette he could die.

He hardly left the bounds of Discombe during those bright autumnal days, when the music of the hounds was loud over field and down. He

had dissevered himself from most of the friends of his manhood by leaving the army; and in Matcham he had only acquaintance. From these he kept scrupulously aloof. One Matcham person, however, he could not escape. Mrs. Mornington surprised him in the music-room with his mother one afternoon, and instead of running away, as he would have done from any one else, he stayed and handed tea-cups with supreme amiability.

He knew she would talk of Suzette. That was inevitable. She had scarcely settled herself in a comfortable armchair when she began.

"Well, Mrs. Wornock, have you seen anything more of this niece of mine?"

Of course there could be only one niece in question.

"No, indeed. She has not come back from Bournemouth, has she?"

"Oh yes, she has. She has come and gone. I made sure she would pay you a visit. You and she were always so thick. I believe she is fonder of you than she is of me."

Geoffrey began to walk about the room—as softly as the parquettèd floor would allow—listening intently. Eager as he was to hear, he could not sit still while Suzette was being discussed.

Mrs. Wornock murmured a gentle negative.

“Oh, but she is, you know. There is that,” said Mrs. Mornington, pointing to the organ, “and that,” pointing to the piano, “and your son is a fiddler. You are music mad, all of you. Suzette took to practising five hours a day. It was Chopin, Rubinstein, Beethoven, and Mendelssohn all day long. She looks upon me as an outsider, because I don’t appreciate classical music. I wonder she didn’t run over to see you.”

“Has she gone back to Bournemouth?”

“Not she. My foolish brother took fright about her because she was looking pale and worried when she came home; so he whisked her off to London, took her to a doctor in Mayfair, who said Schwalbach; and to Schwalbach they are gone, and I believe, after a

course of iron at Schwalbach—where they will meet no civilized beings at this time of year—they are to winter on the Riviera, and a pretty penny these whims and fancies will cost her father. I am glad I have no daughters. Poor Allan! such a fine, honest-hearted young man! She ought to have thanked God for such a sweetheart. I dare say, if he had been a reprobate and a bankrupt, she would have offered to go through fire and water for him.”

Geoffrey walked out at the open window which afforded such a ready escape.

She was gone! Heartless, selfish girl! Gone without a word of farewell, without a whisper of hope.

Allan returned to Matcham a few days after Mrs. Mornington's appearance at Discombe, and in spite of his dark doubts about Geoffrey, his first visit was to Mrs. Wornock.

She was shocked at the change in him. He was pale, and thin, and serious looking, and,

but for his grey-tweed suit, might have been mistaken for an overworked East-end parson.

She talked to him about Lady Emily and the farm. Had he been shooting? Were there many birds this year? She talked of the most frivolous things in order to ward off painful subjects. But he himself spoke of Suzette.

“She has gone away, I am told, for the whole winter. Marsh House is shut up. I never knew what a bright, home-like house it was till I saw it this morning, with the shutters shut, and the gates padlocked. There was not even a dog to bark at me. She has gone far afield; but I am going a good deal farther.”

And then he told her with a certain excitement of his meeting with Cecil Patrington, and his approaching departure for Zanzibar.

“It was the luckiest thing in the world for me,” he said. “I had not the least idea what to do with myself, or where to go, to get out of myself. The little I have seen of the Continent rather bored me—picture-gallery, cathedral, town-hall, a theatre, invariably shut

up, a river, reported delightful when navigable, but not navigable at the time being. The same thing, and the same thing—not very interesting to a man who can't reckon the age of a cathedral to within a century or two—over and over again. But this will be new, this will mean excitement. I shall feel as if I were born again. The wonder will be—to myself, at least—that I don't come home black."

"And you think you will find consolation—in Africa?"

"I hope to find forgetfulness."

"Poor Allan! Poor Geoffrey! It is a hard thing that you should both suffer."

"Mr. Wornock's sufferings will soon be over, I take it. Rapture and not suffering will be the dominant in the scale of his life. He will have everything his own way when I am gone."

"I don't think he will. He has not confided his secrets to me, but I believe he has offered himself to her, since her engagement was broken, and has been rejected."

"He will offer himself again and will be

accepted. There are conventionalities to be observed. Miss Vincent would not like people to say that she transferred her affections from lover to lover with hardly a week's interval."

"I only know that my son is very unhappy, Allan."

"So is a spoilt child when he can't have the moon. Your son will get the moon all in good time—only he will have to wait for it, and spoilt children don't like waiting."

"How bitterly you speak of him, Allan. I hope you are not going to be ill friends."

"Why should we be ill friends? It is not his fault that she has thrown me over—at the eleventh hour. It is only his good fortune to be more attractive than I am. It was the contrast with his brilliancy that showed her my dulness. He has the magnetism which I have not—genius, perhaps, or at least the air and suggestion of genius. One hardly knows what constitutes the real thing. I am one of the crowd. He has the marked individuality which fascinates or repels."

“And you will be friends still, Allan—you and my poor wilful son? He is like a ship without a rudder, now that he has left the army. He has no intimate friends. He cannot rest long in one place. I never wanted him to steal your sweetheart, Allan. I am sure you know that. But I should be very glad to see him married.”

“You will see him married before long—and to the lady who was once my sweetheart.”

Mrs. Wornock shook her head; and the argument was closed by the appearance of Geoffrey himself, who came sauntering in from the garden, with his favourite Clumber spaniel at his heels.

“Been shooting?” Allan asked, as they shook hands.

There was a certain aloofness in their greeting, but nothing churlish or sullen in the manner of either. On Geoffrey’s side there was only listlessness; on Allan’s a grave reserve.

“No. I look at my dogs every day. The keepers do the rest.”

“You are not fond of shooting?”

“Not particularly—not of creeping about a copse on the look-out for a cock pheasant; still less do I love a hot corner!”

He seated himself on the bench by the organ, and began to turn over a pile of music, idly, almost mechanically, not as if he were looking for anything in particular. Allan rose to go, and Mrs. Wornock followed him to the corridor.

“Does he not look wretched? And wretchedly ill?” she asked appealingly; her own unhappiness visible in every line of her face.

“He is certainly changed for the worse since I saw him last. That was a longish time ago, you may remember. He looks hipped and worried. He should go away, as I am going.”

“Not like you, Allan, to a savage country. I wish he would take me to Italy for the winter. We could move from place to place. He could change the scene as often as he liked.”

“I fear the mind would be the same, though

earth and sky might change. Travelling upon beaten paths would only bore him. If he is unhappy, and you are unhappy about him, you had better let him come with Patrington and me.”

The offer was made on the impulse of the moment, out of sympathy with the mother rather than out of regard for the son.

“No, no, I could not bear to lose him again—so soon. What would my life be like if you were both gone? I should lapse into the old loneliness—and solitude would bring back the old dreams—the old vain longing——”

These last words were murmured brokenly, in self-communion.

Allan left her, and she went back to the music-room, where Geoffrey had seated himself at the piano, and was playing a Spanish dance by Sarasate, for the edification of the spaniel, who looked agonized.

“What have you been saying to Carew, mother?” he asked, stopping in the middle of a phrase.

“Nothing of any importance. Allan is going to Central Africa with a friend he met in Suffolk—a Mr. Patrington.”

“A Mr. Patrington? I suppose you mean Cecil Patrington?”

“Yes, that is the name.”

CHAPTER III.

“I GO TO PROVE MY SOUL.”

ALLAN lost no time in making his preparations. He ordered everything that Cecil Patrington told him to order, and in all things followed the advice of that experienced traveller, who consented to spend his last fortnight in England at Beechhurst, where his appearance excited considerable interest in the local mind. He allowed Allan to mount him, and went out with the South Sarum; and as he neither dressed, rode, nor looked like anybody else, he was the object of some curiosity among those outsiders who did not know him as a famous African hunter, a man who had made himself a name among British sportsmen unawares, while following the bent of his own fancy, and caring

nothing what his countrymen at home thought about him.

Lady Emily was her son's guest during the last week, anxious to be with him till he sailed, to postpone the parting till the final day. She was full of sorrow at the idea of a separation which was to last for at least two years, and might extend to double that time if the climate and the manner of life in Central Africa suited Allan. Stanley had taken nearly a year and a half going and returning between Zanzibar and Ujiji, and Stanley had been a much quicker traveller than previous explorers. And Mr. Patrington talked of Ujiji as a starting-point for journeys to the north, and to the west, rambling explorations over less familiar regions, and anon a leisurely journey down to Nyassaland, the African Arcadia. His plans, if carried out, would occupy five or six years.

That sturdy traveller laughed at the mother's apprehensions.

"My dear Lady Emily, you are under a delusion as to the remoteness of the great lake

country. Should your son grow home-sick, something less than a three months' journey will bring him from the Tanganyika to the Thames. Sixty years ago, it took longer to travel from Bombay to London than it does now to come from the heart of Africa."

The mother sighed, and looked mournfully at her son. He was unhappy, and travel and adventure would perhaps afford the best cure for his low spirits. She discussed the situation with Mrs. Mornington when that lady called upon her.

"Your niece has acted very cruelly," she said.

"My niece has acted like a fool. She has made two young men unhappy, and left herself out in the cold. I saw Geoffrey Wornock last week, and he looked a perfect wreck."

"Do you think she cared for him?"

"The girl must care for somebody. Looking back now, I can see that there was a change in her—a gradual change—after Geoffrey Wornock's return. It was very unfortunate.

Either young man would have been a capital match ;” added Mrs. Mornington, waxing practical ; “but she could not marry them both !”

Lady Emily felt angry with Geoffrey as the cause of unhappiness, the indirect cause of the coming separation between herself and her son. How happy she might have been had all gone smoothly ! Allan would have settled at Beechhurst with his young wife ; but they would have spent nearly half of every year in Suffolk. How happy her own life might have been with the son she loved, and the girl whom she was ready to take to her heart as a daughter, but for this wilful cruelty on the part of Suzette !

Lady Emily was sitting in the Mandarin-room with her son and his friend late in the evening, their last evening but one in England. To-morrow they were all going to London together, and on the day after the travellers would embark for Zanzibar.

The night was wet and windy, and a large wood fire burnt and crackled on the ample

hearth. Lady Emily had her embroidered coverlet spread over her lap, and her work-table drawn conveniently near her elbow, in the light of a shaded lamp, while the two men lounged in luxurious chairs in front of the fire. The room looked the picture of comfort, the men companionable, content, and homely, and the mother's heart sank at the thought that years must pass before such an evening could repeat itself in that room, and before her poor Allan would be sitting in so comfortable a chair. It was not without regret that her son had contemplated the idea of their separation, or of his mother's solitary home when he should be gone. He had talked with her of the coming years, suggested the nieces or girl-friends whom she might invite to enliven the slumberous house, and to enjoy the beauty of those fertile gardens and level park-like meadows that stretched to the edge of the river.

"You have troops of friends, mother, and you will have plenty of occupation with your farm, and sovereign power over the whole

estate. Drake"—the bailiff—"will have to consult you about everything."

"Yes, there will be much to be looked at and thought about; but I shall miss you every hour of my life, Allan."

"Not as much as if I had been living at home."

"Every bit as much. I was quite happy thinking of you here. How can I be happy when I picture you toiling alone in the desert under a broiling sun—no water—even the camels dropping and dying under their burdens."

"Dear mother, be happy as to the camels. We shall not be in the camel country. We shall see very little of sandy deserts. Shadowy woods, fertile valleys, the margins of great lakes will be our portion."

"And you will drink the water—which is sure to be unwholesome—and you will get fever."

Allan did not tell his mother that fever was inevitable, a phase of African life which every

traveller must reckon with. He represented African travel as a perpetual holiday in a land of infinite beauty.

"Would Patrington go back there if it were not a delightful life?" he argued. "He has not to get his living there, as the poor fellows have who grill and bake themselves for half a lifetime in India. He goes because he loves the life."

"He goes to shoot big game. He is a horrid, bloodthirsty creature."

Little by little, however, Lady Emily had allowed herself to be persuaded that Central Africa was not so hideous a region as she had supposed. She was told that there were bits of country like Suffolk, a home-like Arcadia on the shores of Nyassa which would remind her of her own farm.

"Then why not make that district your headquarters?" she argued, appealing to Patrington.

"We shall have no head-quarters. We shall wander from one interesting spot to another. We shall settle down only in the Masika season,

when travelling is out of the question—not so much because it couldn't be done as because the blackies won't do it. They are uncommonly careful of themselves ; won't budge in the rains, won't take a canoe on the lake, if there's a bit of a swell on."

"I am glad of that," sighed Lady Emily, with an air of relief; "I am very glad the negroes are prudent and careful."

"A deuced deal too prudent, my dear Lady Emily."

The men were sitting at a table looking at a map, one of Patrington's rough sketch maps, and splotched with a blunt quill pen. He was showing Allan where more scientific map-makers had gone wrong.

"Here's the Lualaba, you see, and here's the little wood where we camped—I seldom use a tent if I can help it, but there wasn't a village within ten miles of that spot."

The door was opened and a servant announced—

"Mr. Wornock."

Allan started up, surprised, thrown off his balance by Geoffrey's entrance. It was half-past ten—Matcham bedtime.

"You have come to bid us good-bye," Allan said, recovering his self-possession as they shook hands. "This is kind and friendly of you."

"I have come to do nothing of the sort. I want to join your party, if you and your friend will have me."

He spoke in his lightest tone; but he was looking worn and ill, and there were all the signs of sleeplessness and worry in his haggard face.

"I know it's the eleventh hour," he said, "but I heard you say," looking from Allan to Patrinton, "that your important preparations have to be made at Zanzibar, where you buy most of the things you want. I—I only made up my mind this evening, after dinner. I am bored to death in England. There is nothing for me to do. I get so tired of things——"

“And your mother?” hazarded Allan, feebly.

“My mother is accustomed to doing without me. I believe I only worry her when I am at home. Will you take me, Carew? ‘Yes,’ or ‘No’?”

“Why, of course it is ‘Yes,’ Mr. Wornock,” exclaimed Lady Emily, coming from the other end of the room, where she had been folding up her work for the night. “Allan, why don’t you introduce Mr. Wornock to me?”

She was radiant, charmed at the idea of a third traveller, and such a traveller as the Squire of Discombe. It seemed to lessen the peril of the expedition, that this other man should want to go, should offer himself thus lightly, on the eve of departure.

She shook hands with Geoffrey in the friendliest way, looking at the wan, worn face with keen interest. Like Allan? Yes, he was like, but not so good-looking. His features were too sharply cut; his hollow cheeks and sunken eyes made him look ever so much older

than Allan, thought the mother, admiring her own son above all the world.

"Of course they will take you," she said, looking from one to the other. "It will make the expedition ever so much pleasanter for them both. They will feel less lonely."

"I ain't afraid of loneliness," growled Patrington; "but if Mr. Wornock really wishes to go with us, and will fall into our plans, and not want to make alterations, and upset our route for whims of his own, I'm agreeable. It isn't always easy for three men to get on smoothly, you see. Even two don't always hit it—Burton and Speke, for instance. There were bothers."

"You shall be my chief and captain," protested Geoffrey, "and if you should tire of me, well, I can always wander off on my own hook, you know. I could start by myself, now, take my chance and trust to native guides, choose another line of country, where I couldn't molest you——"

"Molest! My dear Wornock, if you are

really in earnest, really inclined to join us as a pleasant thing to do, and not a caprice of the moment, I shall be glad to have you, and I think Patrington will have no objection," said Allan, hastily.

"Not the slightest. I only want unity of purpose. You don't look very fit," added Patrington, bluntly; "but you can rough it, I suppose?"

"Yes; I'm not afraid of hardships."

"I should like to have a few words with you before anything is settled, if you will take a turn on the terrace," said Allan, and on Geoffrey assenting, he went over to the glass door, and led the way to the gravel walk outside.

The rain was over, and the moon was shining out of a ragged mass of cloud.

"Why do you leave this place, now, when you are master of the situation?" Allan asked abruptly, when he and Geoffrey had walked a few paces.

"I am not master, no more than a beaten hound is master. I have mastered nothing,

not even the lukewarm regard which she still professes for you. She has thrown you over, but I am not to be the gainer. I went to her directly I knew she was free. I offered myself to her, an adoring slave. But she would have none of me. She did not love you enough to be your wife; but for me she had only contempt, cruel words, mocking laughter that cut me like a bunch of scorpions. I am frank with you, Carew. If I had a ghost of a chance, I would follow her to Schwalbach, to the Riviera, all round this globe on which we crawl and suffer. Distance should not divide us. But I am too much a man to pursue a woman who scorns me. I want to forget her; I mean to forget her; and I think I might have a chance if I went with you and your chum yonder. I should like to go with you, unless you dislike me too much to be at ease in my company."

"Dislike you! No, indeed, I do not."

"I'm glad of that. My mother is very fond of you. You have been to her almost as a son. It will comfort her to think that we are together,

together in danger and difficulty, and if one of us should not come back——”

“Nonsense, Wornock! Of course we are coming back. Look at Patrington——”

“Ah, but he has been a solitary traveller. When two go, there is always one who stays.”

“If you think that, you had much better stop at home.”

“No, no; the risk is the best part of the business to a man of my temper. It's the toss-up that I like. Heads, a safe return; tails, death in the wilderness—death by niggers, wild beasts, flood, or fire. I go with my life in my hand, as the catch phrase of the day has it; and if there were no hazards, no danger—well, one might as well stay at home, or play polo at Simla. Fellows get themselves killed even at that. Allan, we have been rivals, but not enemies. Shall we be brothers, henceforward?”

“Yes, friends and brothers, if you will.”

They went back to the Mandarin-room, and when Lady Emily had bidden them good night, the three men lit up pipes and cigars, and

talked about that wonder-world of tropical Africa, and what they were to do there, till the night grew late, and the Manor groom, dozing on the settle by the saddle-room fire after a hearty supper of beef and beer, questioned querulously whether his gov'nor meant to go home before daylight.

CHAPTER IV.

BLACK AND WHITE.

A YEAR and more, spring and summer, autumn and winter, had gone by since Allan Carew and his companions set their faces towards the Dark Continent; and now it was spring again, the early spring of Central Africa; and under the pale cloudless blue of a tropical sky three white men, with their modest following of Wangwana and Wanyamwezi—a company no bigger than that with which Captain Trivier crossed from shore to shore—camped beside the Sea of Ujiji. They had come from the east, and the journey from the coast opposite Zanzibar, taken very easily, with many halting-places on the way, had occupied the best part of a year. Some of those resting-places had been chosen for sport,

for exploration, for repose after weary and troublesome stages. Sometimes a long halt had been forced upon the travellers by sickness, by inclement weather, by the rebellion or the perversity of their men—those porters upon whose endurance and good will their comfort and safety alike depended, in a land where it has been truly said that “luggage is life.”

That march from Bagamoyo, Stanley's starting-point, through the vicissitudes of the road and the seasons, had not been all pleasure; and there were darker hours on the way, when, toiling on with aching head and blistered feet, half stifled by the rank mists and poisonous odours of a jungle that smelt of death, Allan Carew and his companions may have wished themselves back in the beaten paths of a civilized world, where there is no need to think of bed or dinner, and where all that life requires for sustenance and support seems to come of itself. But if there had been weak yearnings for the comfortable, as opposed to the adventurous, not one of the three travellers had ever

given any indication of such backsliding. Each in his turn stricken down—not once, but often—by the deadly mukunguru, or African fever, had rallied and girded his loins for the journey without an hour's needless delay; and then, on recovery, there had followed a fervent joy in life and nature; a rapture in the atmosphere; a keener eye for every changeful light and colour in earth and sky; the blissful sensations of a newly created being, basking in a new world. It was almost worth a man's while to pass through the painful stages of that deadly fever, the ague fit and languor, the yawning and drowsiness which mark the beginning of sickness, the raging thirst and throbbing temples, the aching spine and hideous visions that are its later agonies, in order to feel that ecstasy of restored health in which the convalescent sees ineffable loveliness even in the dull monotony of rolling woods, and thrills with friendship and love for the dusky companions of his journey.

Loneliness and horror, pleasantness and

danger, a startling variety of scenes had been traversed between the red coast of Eastern Africa and that vast inland sea where many rivers meet and mingle in the deep bosom of the mountains. Across the monotony of rolling woods that rise and fall in a seemingly endless sequence; by fever-haunted plains and swampy hollows; through the dripping scrub of the Makata wilderness; in all the dull horror of the Masika season, when the long swathes of tiger-grass lie rotting under the brooding mists that curtain the foul-smelling waste, when the Makata river has changed from a narrow stream to a vast lake which covers the plain, and in whose shallow waters trees and canes and lush green parasites subside into tangled masses of putrid vegetation, until to the traveller's weary eye it seems as if this very earth were slowly rotting in universal and final decay.

They had come through many a settlement, friendly or unfriendly, through rivers difficult to cross by ford or ferry, difficult and costly too, since there are dusky sultans who take toll

of these white adventurers at every ferry, sometimes rival chiefs who set up a claim to the same ferry, and have to be defied or satisfied—generally the latter; through many a *guet à pens*, where the “whit-whit” of the long arrows sounded athwart the woods as the travellers hurried by; through scenes of beauty and romantic grandeur; across vast expanses of green sward diversified with noble timber, calmly picturesque as an English park—a hunter’s paradise of big game. They had journeyed at a leisurely pace, loitering wherever nature invited to enjoyment, their camp of the simplest, their followers as few as the absolute necessities of the route demanded.

By these same forest paths, fighting his way through the same inexorable jungle, Burton had come on his famous voyage of discovery to the unknown lake; and by the same, or almost the same, paths Stanley had followed in his search for the great God-fearing traveller, brave and calm and patient, who made Africa his own. And here had come Cameron, meeting

that dead lord of untrodden lands, journeying on other men's shoulders, no longer the guide and chief, but the silent companion of a sorrowful pilgrimage. Lonely as the track might be, it was peopled with heroic memories.

"I should like to have been the first to come this way," Geoffrey had said with a vexed air, as he twirled the tattered leaves of Burton's book, which, with Stanley's and Cameron's travels, and Goethe's "Faust," composed the whole of his library.

"You would always like to be first," Allan answered, laughing. "Is it not enough for you that you are the mightiest hunter of us three—the father of meat, as our boys call you—and that finer giraffes and harte beestes have fallen before your gun than even Patrington can boast, experienced sportsman though he is?"

Patrington assented with a lazy comfortable laugh, stretched his legs on the reed mat under the rough verandah, and refilled his pipe.

He was content to take the second place in the record of sport, and to let this restless fiery

spirit satisfy its feverish impulses in the toils and perils of the jungle or the plain.

Here was a young man with an insatiable love of sport, an activity of brain and body which nothing tired, and it was just as well to let him work for the party, while the older traveller, and nominal chief of the expedition, basked in the February sun, and read "Pickwick."

A little brown-leather bound Bible, which he had used a good many years before at Harrow, and a dozen or so of Tauchnitz volumes, all by the same author, and all tattered and torn in years of travel and continual reperusal, constituted Mr. Patrington's stock of literature. Allan was the only member of the party who had burdened himself with a varied library of a dozen or so of those classics which a man cannot read too much or too often; for, indeed, could any man, not actually a student, exercise so much restraint over himself as to restrict his reading for three or four years to a dozen or so of the world's greatest

books, that man would possess himself of a better literary capital than the finest library in London or Paris can provide for the casual reader, hurrying from author to author, from history to metaphysics, from Homer to Horace, from Herodotus to Froude, the wasting years of careless reading upon those snares for the idle mind—books about books. Half the intelligent readers in England know more about Walter Pater's opinion of Shelley or Buxton Forman's estimate of Keats than they know of the poems that made Shelley and Keats famous.

Dickens reigned alone in Cecil Pattrington's literary Valhalla. He always talked of the author of "Pickwick" as "he" or "him." Like Mr. Du Maurier's fine gentleman who thought there was only one man in London who could make a hat, Mr. Pattrington would only recognize one humourist and one writer of fiction.

"How he would have enjoyed this kind of life!" he said. "What fun he would have got out of those crocodiles! What a word picture

he would have made of our storms, and the Masika rains, and those rolling woods, that illimitable forest t'other side of Ukonongo! and how he would have understood all the ins and outs in the minds of our Zanzibaris, and of the various nigger-chiefs whose society we have enjoyed, and whose demands we have had to satisfy, upon the road!"

"Have they minds?" asked Geoffrey, with open scorn. "I doubt the existence of anything you can call mind in the African cranium. Hunger and greed are the motive power that moves the native mechanism; but mind, no. They have ferocious instincts, such as beasts have, and the craving for food. Feed them, and they will love you to-day; but they will rob and murder you to-morrow, if they see the chance of gaining by the transaction."

"Oh, come, I won't have our boys maligned. I have lived among them for years, remember, while you are only a new-comer. Granted that they are greedy. They are only greedy as children are. They are like children——"

“Exactly. They are like children. They could not be like anything worse.”

“What!” cried Patrington, with a look of horror, “have you no faith in the goodness and purity of a child?”

“In its goodness, not a whit! Purity, yes; the purity of ignorance, which we call innocence, and pretend to admire as an exquisite and touching attribute of the undeveloped human being. These blackies are just as good and just as bad as the average child; greedy, grasping, selfish; selfish, grasping, greedy; ready to kiss the feet of the man who comes back to the village with an antelope on his shoulder; ready to send a poisoned arrow after him if on parting company he refuses to be swindled out of cloth or beads. They are bad, Patrington—if I were not a disciple of Locke, I would say they are innately bad. But what does that matter? We are all bad.”

“What a pleasant way you have of looking at life and your fellow-men!” said Patrington.

“I look life and my fellow-man full in the face, and I ask myself if there is any man living whose nature—noble, perhaps, according to the world’s esteem—does not include a latent capacity for evil. Every man and every woman, the best as well as the worst, is a potential criminal. Do you think *that* Macbeth who came over the heath at sundown after the battle, flushed with victory, was a scoundrel? Not he. There was not a captain in the Scottish army more loyal to his king. He was only an ambitious man. Temptation and opportunity did all the rest. Temptation, were it only strong enough, and opportunity, would make a murderer of you or me.”

“‘Lead us not into temptation.’ Oh, wondrous wise and simple prayer, which riseth every night and morning out of the mouths of babes and sucklings over all the Christian world, and in a few brief phrases includes every aspiration needful for humanity!” said Cecil Patrington, who was in matters theological just where he had been when his boyish head was

bowed under the Episcopal hand on the day of his confirmation.

Far away from new books and new opinions, knowing not the names of Spencer or Clifford, Schopenhauer or Hartmann, this rough traveller's religion was the unquestioning faith of Paul Dombey, of Hester Summerson and Agnes Whitfield and Little Nell, of all the gentlest creatures in the dream-world of Charles Dickens.

There was leisure and to spare for argument and discussion here in this quiet settlement on the shore of the great lake. The travellers had established themselves in a deserted *tembe*, which had been allotted to them by the Arab chieftain of the land, and which was pleasantly situated on a ridge of rising ground about a mile from the busy village of Ujiji. They had done all that laborious ingenuity could do to purify the rough clay structure, ridding it as far as possible of the plague of insects that crawled in the darkness below or buzzed in the thatch above, of the rats which the dusk of

evening brought out in gay and familiar riot, and the snakes that followed in their train, and the huge black spiders, whose webs choked every corner. They had knocked out openings under the deep eaves of the thatched roof—openings which allowed of cross-currents of air, and were regarded by their Zanzibaris and Unyanyembis with absolute horror. Only once in their pilgrimage had the travellers found a hut with windows.

“What does a man want in his *tembe* but warmth and shelter? And how can these white men be so foolish as to make openings that let in the cold?” argued the native mind; nor was the native mind less exercised by the trouble these three white men took to keep their *tembe* and its surroundings, the verandah, the ground about it, severely clean, or by their war of extermination against that insect life whose ravages the African suffers with a stoical indifference.

The travellers had established themselves in this convenient spot—close to the port and

market of Ujiji—to wait for the Masika, the season of rain that raineth every day—rain that closes round the camp like a dense wall of water—such rain as a man must go to the tropics to see, and which, once having seen, he is not likely to forget. They could hardly be better off anywhere, when the rains of April should come upon them, than they would be here. The natives were friendly; friendly too, friendly and kind and helpful, was the mighty Arab chief Roumariza, the white Arab, sovereign lord of these regions, sole master here, where the sceptre of the Sultan of Zanzibar reaches not: a man whose word is law, and in whose hand is plenty.

Roumariza looked upon Cecil Patrington's party with the eye of favour, and upon Patrington as an old friend—nay, almost a subject of his own, so familiar was Patrington's bronzed face in those regions, whither he had come close upon the footsteps of Cameron, and when that lake land of tropical Africa was still a new world, untrodden by the white man's foot, the

northern shores of the lake still unexplored, the vast country of Rua unknown even to the Arabs.

At Ujiji provisions were plentiful and cheap. At Ujiji there were boat-builders; and canoes and rowers were at hand for the exploration of the vast fresh-water sea. Indeed, there was only too much civilization and human life to please that son of the wilderness, Cecil Pattrington.

“I love the unknown better than the known,” he said. “We shall never see the lake again as Burton saw it—before ever the sound of engine and paddle-wheel had been heard on that broad blue expanse, when the monkeys chattered and screamed and slung themselves from tree to tree in a tumult of wonder at sight of the white wayfarer. Nobody can ever enjoy the sense of rapture and surprise that took Cameron’s breath away as he looked down from the hills and saw the wide-reaching, pale blue water flashing in the sun. He took the lake itself for a cloud at the first glance, and a little

islet for the lake, and asked his men, with bitterest chagrin, 'Is this all?' And then the niggers pointed, and these vast waters spread themselves out of the cloud, and he saw this mighty sea shining out of its dark frame of mountain and plain forest. Jupiter, what a moment! *I* could never enjoy that surprise. I had read Cameron's book, and he had discounted the situation for me; he had swindled me out of my emotions. I knew the breadth and length of the lake to within a mile—no chance of mistake for *me*. Yes, I said. Here is the Tanganyika, and it is a very fine sheet of blue water; and pray where is the Swiss porter to take my luggage? or where shall I find the omnibus for the best hotel? Mark me, lads, before we have been long underground, there will be hotels and omnibuses and Swiss porters, and the Cooks and Gazes of the future will deal in through tickets to the African lakes, and this great heart of Africa will be the Englishman's favourite holiday ground. Let but the tramway Stanley talks about be laid from

Bagamoyo to the interior, and 'Arry will be lord of Central Africa, as he is of the rest of the earth."

Idle talk in idle hours beside the camp-fire. Though the days were as sunny and summer-like as February on the Riviera, the nights were cold ; and after sundown masters and men liked to sit by their fires and watch the pine-wood crackle and the flames leap through the smoke like living things, vanish and reappear, fade into darkness or flicker into light with swifter and more sudden movement than even the thoughts of the men who watched them.

The porters and servants had their own huts and their own fires. They had made a rough stockade round the cluster of bee-hive huts—a snug settlement, which Allan compared to a mediæval fortress, one of the Scottish castles, whose inhabitants live and move in the pages of the Wizard of the North. Allan was a devoted worshipper of Scott, whom he held second only to Shakespeare ; and as Cecil Patrington claimed exactly this position for Charles Dickens, the question afforded an inexhaustible

subject for argument, sometimes mild and philosophical, sometimes vehement and angry, to which Geoffrey listened yawningly, or into which he plunged with superior vehemence and arbitrary assertion if it were his humour to be interested.

In a land where there was no daily record of what mankind were doing, no newspaper at morning and evening recounting the last pages of the world's history, telling the story of yesterday's crimes and catastrophes, sickness and death, wrong and right, evil and good, adventures, successes, failures, inventions, gains and losses—every movement near or far in the great mill-wheel of human life—deprived of newspapers, of civilized society, and of all the business of money-getting and money-spending, it was only in such discussions that these exiles could find subjects for conversation. The contents of the letters and papers that had reached them three months before at Tabora, brought on from Zanzibar by an Arab caravan bound for the hunting-grounds of Rua, had been long

exhausted ; and now there was only the populace of the great romancers to talk about in the long chilly evenings, when they were in no mood for piquet or poker, and too lazy-brained for the arduous pleasures of chess. Then it was pleasant to lie in front of the fire and dispute the merits of one's favourite novelist, or some abstract question in the regions of philosophy. Sometimes the three men's talk would wander from Dickens to Plato, from Scott to Aristotle, from Macaulay to Thucydides. Allan was the most bookish of the three, and his knowledge of German enabled him to carry the lightest of travelling-libraries, in the shape of that handy series of little paper-covered books which includes the best German authors, together with translations of all the classics, ancient and modern, Greek, Latin, Norse, English, French, Italian, at twopence-halfpenny per volume—tiny booklets, of which he could carry half a dozen in the pockets of his flannel jacket, and which comprised the literature of the world in the smallest possible compass.

For more than a year, these three men had been dependent upon one another's society for all intellectual solace, for all mental comfort; for more than a year they had looked upon no white faces but their own, so tanned and darkened by sun and weather that they had come to talk of themselves laughingly as white Arabs, or semi-negroids, and to opine that they would never look like Englishmen again. Indeed, Cecil Patrington, whose fifteen years of manhood had been chiefly spent under tropic stars, had no desire ever again to wear the sickly aspect of the home-keeping Englishman, whom he spoke of disparagingly as a turnip-face. Bronzed and battered, and hardened by the hard life of the desert, he laughed to scorn the amenities of modern civilization and the iron bondage of the claw-hammer coat.

“Male humanity is divided into two classes—the men who dress for dinner, and the men who don't. I have always belonged to the latter half. We are the freemen; our shoulders have never bent under the yoke. I ran away from

every school I was ever sent to. I played Hell and Tommy at my private tutor's Berkshire parsonage—set fire to his study when he locked me in, with an order to construe five tough pages of 'Thicksides,' for insubordination. I set fire to his waste-paper basket, lads, and his missus's muslin curtains. I knew I could put the fire out with his garden-hose, when I had given him a good scare; and after that little bit of arson, he was uncommonly glad to get rid of me. The old Herod had insisted on my dressing for dinner every night—putting on a claw-hammer coat and a white tie to eat barley-broth and boiled mutton. I wasn't going to stop in such a *bouge* as that. Then came the university. I was always able to scramble through an exam., so I matriculated with flying colours—passed my Little Go with a flourish of trumpets; and my people hoped I had turned over a new leaf. So I had, boys—a new leaf in a new book. I had begun to read the story of African travel—Livingstone, Burton, Baker, du Chaillu, Stanley. And from that hour I knew what

manner of life I was meant for. I got my kind old dad to give me a biggish cheque — compounded with him, before my second term at Trinity was over, for the fifteen hundred my university career would have cost him — and sailed for the Cape; and from that day to this, except when I read a paper one night in Savile Row, I have never worn the garment of the white slave. I have never thrust these hairy arms of mine into the silk-lined sleeves of a swallow-tail coat.”

For the eldest traveller those days before the coming of the Masika left nothing to be desired. The long coasting voyages on the great fresh-water sea, the canoes following the romantic shores or threading the southern archipelago where the river Lofu pours its broad stream into the lake, were enough for exercise, excitement, variety.

For Cecil Patrington — for the man who carried no burden of bitter memories, whose heart ached not with the yearning for home

faces, the joys of Central Africa were all-sufficing. He had been happy in scenes far less lovely; happy in arid deserts such as the Roman poet pictured to himself in the luxurious repose of his suburban villa — deserts to be made endurable by the presence of Lalage. Cecil Patrington would not have exchanged his Winchester rifle for the loveliest Lalage; he wanted to kill, not to be killed. No sweetly smiling, no prettily prattling society would have made up to him for the lack of big game and the means of slaughter. Perhaps he, too, had dreamed his dream, even as Mr. Jaggers had. There is no man so unlikely of aspect that he may not once have been a lover. Is not the faithfullest, fondest lover in all modern fiction the hunchback Quasimodo? But if this rough sportsman had ever succumbed to the common fever, had ever sighed and suffered, his malady was a thing of the remote past. In his most confidential talk there had never been the faintest indication of a romantic attachment.

“Why did I never marry?” he echoed, when

the question was asked jestingly, beside the camp-fire, in the early stages of their journey. "I had neither time nor inclination, nor money to waste upon such an expensive toy as a wife; a wife who would eat her head off in England while I was knocking about over here, a wife who would cost me more than a caravan."

This was all that Mr. Patrington ever said about the matrimonial question; but marriage is a subject upon which some men never reveal their real thoughts.

He took life as merrily as if it had been a march in a comic opera; and in the presence of his cheerfulness the two young men kept their troubles to themselves.

Had Allan forgotten Suzette under those tropic stars? No, he had not achieved forgetfulness; but he had learnt to live without love, without the light of a fair woman's face; and in a modified way to be happy. The changes and chances, difficulties, accidents, and adventures of the journey between the coast and Tabora had kept his mind fully occupied. Fever, and

recovery from fever ; failure or success with his gun ; difficult negotiations with village sultans ; and even an occasional skirmish in which the poisoned arrows flew fast, and the stern necessity of firing on their assailants had stared them in the face ; all these things had left little leisure for love-sick dreams, for fond regrets.

CHAPTER V.

THE MEETING-PLACE OF WATERS.

AT Tabora there had been a long halt, a delay forced upon the travellers by the conditions of climate, by the sickness and the idleness of their caravan ; but this interval of rest had not been altogether disagreeable. The place was a place of fatness, a settlement in the midst of a fertile plan where the flocks and herds, the Arab population, the pastoral life suggested those familiar pictures in that first book of ancient history which the child takes into his newly awakened consciousness ; and which the hard and battered wayfarer—believer or agnostic—loves and admires to the end of life. In just such a scene as this Rebecca might have given Isaac the fateful draught of water from the way-side well ; upon just such a level pasture Joseph

and his brethren might have tended their flocks and watched the stars. The visions of the young dreamer would have shown him this pale milky azure, over-arching the rich level where the sheaves bowed down to his sheaves ; and in just such a reposeful atmosphere would he have laid himself down for the noontide siesta, and let his fancy slide into the dim labyrinth of dreamland.

At Tabora there had been overmuch time for thought, and the yearning for a far-away face must needs have been in the hearts of both those young Englishmen, whose bronzed features were sternly and steadily set with the resolute calm of men who do not mean to waste in despair and die for love of the fairest woman upon earth.

Often and often in the dusk, Allan heard his comrade's rich baritone rolling out that old song—

“ Shall I, wasting in despair,
Die, because a woman's fair ?
Or make pale my checks with care
Because another's rosy are ? ”

The voice thrilled him. What a gift is that music which gives a man power over his fellow-men? Geoffrey's fiddle talked to them nearly every night beside the camp-fire, talked to them sometimes at daybreak, when its owner had been sleepless; for that restless spirit had watched too many long blank hours in the course of his travels. It had been hard work to convey that fiddle-case across the rolling woods, through swamp and river, guarded from the crass stupidity of native porters—from the obstinacy of the African donkey—the curiosity of the inhabitants of the villages on the way. Geoffrey had carried it himself for the greater part of the journey; refusing to trust Arab or Negroid with so precious a burden. Riding or walking, he had managed to take care of his little Amati, the smallest but not the least valuable of all his fiddles.

There were some among his dark followers to whom Geoffrey's Amati was an enchanted thing, a thing that ought to have been alive if it was not; indeed, there were some who

secretly believed that it was a living creature. The velvet nest in which he kept the strange thing, the delicate care with which he laid it in that luxurious resting-place, or took it out into the light of day; the loving movement with which he rested his chin on the shining wood, while his long lissome fingers twined themselves caressingly about the creature's neck; the strange light that came into his eyes as he drew the bow across the strings, and the ineffable sounds which those strings gave forth; all these were tokens of a living presence, a something to be loved and feared.

When he tuned his fiddle, they thought that he was punishing it, and that it shrieked and groaned in its agony. Why else were those sounds so harsh and discordant, so unlike the melting strains which the thing gave forth when he laid his chin upon it and loved it, when his lips smiled, and his melancholy eyes looked far away into the purple distances, across the woods and the plains, to the remoteness of the mountain range beyond?

If it were not actually alive—if it had neither heart nor blood as they had, why, then, it was a familiar demon—a charm—by which he who possessed it could influence his fellow-men. He could rouse them to savage raptures, to shrieks and wild leaps that were meant for dancing. He could melt them to tears.

From the first hour when he played by the camp-fire, on the third night after they left Bagamoyo, Geoffrey's music had given him a hold over the more intelligent members of the carayan. They had listened at first almost as the dog listens, and had been ready to lift up their heads and howl as the dog howls. But gradually those singing sounds had exercised a soothing influence, they had sprawled at his feet, a ring of listeners, with elbows on the ground, looking up at him out of onyx eyes that flashed in the firelight.

Among their followers there were some Makololos from the Shire Valley, men of superior courage and determination, a finer race than the common herd of African porters, of the

same race as those faithful followers of Livingstone's first great journey, who afterwards became chiefs and rulers of the land. These Makololos adored Geoffrey. His music, the achievements of his Winchester rifle, that ardent fitful temperament of his, exercised an extraordinary influence over these men; and it seemed as if they would have followed him without fee or reward, for sheer love of the man himself; not for meat, and cloth, and beads, and brass wire.

Never a word said Geoffrey or Allan of that one woman whose image filled the minds of both. They talked of other people freely enough. Each spoke of his mother tenderly, regretfully even, Allan taking comfort from the thought of Lady Emily's delight in her farm, the occupation and interest which every change of the seasons brought for her. Such letters as had reached him on his wanderings had been resigned and uncomplaining, although dwelling sorrowfully upon the husband she had lost.

“He used to live so much apart, shut in his library day after day, and only joining me in the evening, that I could hardly have believed my life could seem so empty without him. But I know now how much his presence in the house—even his silent, unseen presence—meant for me ; and I realize now how often I used to go to him, interrupting his dreamy life with my petty household questions, my little bits of news from the farmyard or the cow-houses, or the garden. He was so kind and sympathetic. He would look up from his books to interest himself in some story about my Brahmas or my Cochins, and if he was bored, he never allowed me to see the faintest sign of impatience. I think he was the best and truest man that ever lived. And my Allan is like him. May God protect and bless my dearest, my only dear, in all the perils of the desert !”

Lady Emily's mental picture of Africa represented one far-reaching waste of level sand, a desert flatness incompatible with a spherical earth, pervaded by camels, and occasionally

varied by a mirage. A pair of pyramids—like tall candlesticks at the end of a board-room table—a sphinx and a crocodily river occupied the north-east corner of this vast plateau, while the south-west was distinguished by a colony of ostriches, and the place to which Indian officials used to resort for change of air some fifty years since. To these narrow limits were restricted Lady Emily's notions of the continent on which her son was now a wanderer. She feared that if he got out of the way of the crocodiles he might fall in with the ostriches, which doubtless were dangerous when encountered in large numbers; and she shuddered at the sight of her feather fan.

Mrs. Wornock's letters were in a sadder strain. The key was distinctly minor. She wrote of her loneliness; of the monotonous days; the longing for the face that had vanished.

“My organ talks to me of you—Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Mendelssohn, all tell me the same story. You are far away—away for a long time—and life is very sad.”

There was not a word of Suzette in those letters. If she was ever at the Manor, if Mrs. Wornock retained her affection and found solace in her society, there was no hint of that consoling presence. It might be that the girl hated the house because of that vehement stormy love which had assailed her there; the love that would not let her be faithful to a more reasonable lover.

“And yet—and yet!” thought Geoffrey, hardly caring even in his own mind to put the question positively.

In his innermost consciousness there was the belief that she loved him—him, Geoffrey Wornock—that she had refused him perversely and foolishly, out of a mistaken sense of honour. She would not marry Allan whom she did not love; and she refused to marry Geoffrey whom she did love, in order to spare her jilted lover the pain of seeing a rival’s triumph.

“But I am not beaten yet,” Geoffrey told himself. “When I go back to England—if I but find her free—I shall try again. Allan’s

wounds will have healed by that time ; and even her Quixotic temper will have satisfied itself by the sacrifice of two years of her lover's life."

"When I go back !" Musing sometimes on that prospect of the homeward journey, whether returning by the road they had come, or dropping down southward by Trivier's route to the Nyassa and the Zambesi, or by the more adventurous westward line by the forest and the Congo, the way by which Trivier had come to the Lake, whichever way were eventually chosen, Geoffrey asked himself if the three travellers would all go back ?

"One shall be taken and the other left."

Throughout the record of African travel, there is that dark feature of the story ; the traveller who is left behind. Sometimes it is the fever fiend that lays a scorching hand upon the fearless adventurer, flings him down to suffer thirst and pain and heaviness, and delirious horrors, in the foul darkness of a bee-hive hut, to die in a dream of home, with

shadowy faces looking down at him, familiar voices talking with him. Sometimes he falls in a ring of savage foes, hemmed round with hideous faces, foes as fierce and implacable as lion or leopard; foes who kill for the sake of killing; or cannibals, for whom a murdered man provides the choicest banquet. The hazards of the pilgrimage take every shape, death by drowning, death by massacre, death by small-pox or jungle fever, death by starvation, by the bursting of a gun, by beasts of prey. In every story of travel there is always that dark page which tells of the man who is left. Dillon, Farquhar, the two Pococks, Jameson, Bartelott, Weissemurger—the ghosts that haunt the pathways of tropical Africa are many; but those melancholy shadows exercise no deterring influence on the traveller who sets out to-day, strong, elate, hopeful, inspired by an eager curiosity which takes no heed of trouble or of risk.

“Which of us three is to stay behind?”
Geoffrey asked himself in a gloomy wonder.

Not Patrington. He had come to the stage at which the traveller bears a charmed life. It is seldom the experienced wanderer, the man of many journeys, who falls by the wayside. Hot-headed youth, bold in its ignorance of danger, perishes like a bird caught in a trap. The strong frame of the trained athlete shrivels like a leaf in the hot blast of fever. The careless boatman tempts the perils of a difficult passage, and is swept over the stony bed of the torrent, and vanishes in the fathomless pool. The hardened traveller knows what he is about, and can reckon with the forces of that gigantic nature which he faces and defies. It is the tyro who pays the price of his inexperience, and, in the history of African travel, the survival of the fittest is the rule.

“Which of us?” That question had entered into the very fabric of Geoffrey’s thoughts. Sometimes, sitting by the camp-fire as the chillness of night crept round them, a grisly fancy would flash across his reverie, and he would think that the pale mist that rose about

Allan's figure, on the other side of the circle, was the shroud which the Highlander sees upon the shoulders of a friend marked for death.

"Would it be Allan?" If it were Allan, he, Geoffrey, would hasten home to tell the sad story, and then—to claim her whose too-tender conscientiousness had refused happiness at Allan's expense. Allan gone, there would be no reason why she should deny her love.

"For I know, I know that she loves me," Geoffrey repeated to himself.

He had been telling himself that story ever since he left England. No denial from those lovely lips, no words of scorn, would convince him that he was unloved. He could recall looks and tones that told another story. He had seen the gradual change in her which told of an awakening heart.

"She never knew what love means till she knew me," he told himself. Did he wish for Allan's death? No, there was no such hideous thought in the dark labyrinth of his mind; or, at least, he believed that there was not. One

must perish ! He had so brooded over the story of former victims that he had taught himself to look upon one lost life as inevitable. But the lot was as likely to fall upon him as upon Allan. More likely, since his habits were more reckless and more adventurous than Allan's. If there was danger to be found, he and his Makololos courted it. Shooting expeditions, raids upon unfriendly villages, hand-to-hand skirmishes with Mirambo's brigand tribes ; he and his Makololos were ready for anything. He had travelled over hundreds of miles with his warlike little gang—exploring, shooting, fighting—while Patrington and Allan were living in dreamy inaction, waiting for better weather, or for the recovery of half a dozen ailing pagazis. Assuredly he who ran such superfluous risks was the more likely to fall by the way. Well, death is a solution of all difficulties.

“If I am dead, it will matter to me very little that my bright, ineffable coquette is transformed into a sober, middle-aged wife, and that she

and Allan are smiling at each other across the family breakfast-table, in their calm heaven of domestic hum-drum. But while I live and am young I shall think of her and long for her, and hate the lucky wretch who wins her. If we should both go back; if Patrington's tough bones are the bones that are to whiten by the way, and not Allan's or mine; why, then, we shall again be rivals; and the years of exile will be only a dream that we have dreamt."

It was a strange position in which these two young men found themselves. Friends, almost as brothers in the close intimacy of that solitude of three, only three civilized thinking beings amidst a crowd of creatures who seemed as far apart as if they had belonged to the forest fauna—the great antelope family—or the simian race; these two, so nearly of an age, reared in the same country and the same social sphere, united and sympathetic at every point of contact between mind and mind, and yet keeping this one deep gulf of silence between them.

They spoke to each other freely of all things, except of her ; and yet each knew that she was the one absorbing subject in the mind of the other. Each knew that her image went along with them, was never absent, never less distinctly lovely, even when the way was fullest of hardship and peril, when every yard of progress meant a struggle with thorns that tore them, and brambles that lashed them, and the tough, rank verdure-carpet that clogged their feet. Neither had ever ceased to remember her, or to think of these adventurous days as anything else than exile from her. Whatever interest or enjoyment there might be in that varied experience of a land where beauty and ugliness alternated with startling transitions, it was not possible that either Allan or Geoffrey could forget the reason they were there, far from the fair faces of women, and from all the ease and pleasantness of civilized life.

Geoffrey had the better chance of oblivion, since those wild excursions and explorations of his afforded the excitement of the untrodden

and the hazardous. The caravan road from the coast to Ujiji, with all its varieties of hardship, was too beaten a track for this fiery spirit. At every halting-place he went off at a tangent; and if his comrades threatened not to wait for his return, he would pledge himself to rejoin them further on, laughing to scorn every suggestion that he and his little company of Makololos and Wanyamwesis could lose themselves in the wilderness.

He was more in touch with the men than Allan—as familiar with their ways and ideas as Patrington after many years of travel. He had learnt their languages with a marvellous quickness—not the copious language of civilization and literature, be it remembered, but the concise vocabulary of the camp and the hunting-ground, the river and the road. He understood his men and their different temperaments as few travellers learn to understand, or desire to understand them. And yet there was but little Christian benevolence at the root of this quick sympathy and comprehension. Although, as

an Englishman, Geoffrey would have given no sanction to the sale and barter of his fellow-creatures, these dark servants were to him no more than slaves—so much carrying power and so much fighting power, subject to his domination. It pleased him to know their characters, to be able to play upon their strength and weakness, their ferocity and their greed, just as surely as he manipulated the stops of the great organ at Discombe.

These Africans gave a name of their own choosing to almost everybody. They christened the great Sultan of the interior Tippto-Tib, because of a curious blinking of his eyes. Captain Trivier obtained his nickname on account of his eye-glass. Another man was named after his spectacles. The Sultan of Ujiji was called Roumariza—"It is ended,"—because he had succeeded in reducing belligerent tribes to peaceful settlement. For the Englishman in particular, Africa could always find a nickname, based on some insignificant detail of manner or appearance. For Englishmen in general she

had found a nobler-sounding name. She called them Sons of Fire.

Geoffrey, with his tireless energy, his rapid decision, his angry impatience of delay, seemed to his followers the very highest exemplar of the fiery race that can persevere and conquer difficulties which the native of the soil recoils from as insurmountable.

Sons of Fire! Were they not worthy of the name, these white men, when far out in mid-stream, while the boatmen bent and cowered over their paddles, these Englishmen looked in the face of the lightning and sat calm and unmoved while day darkened to the pitchy blackness of a starless midnight, and the thunder reverberated from hill to hill, with roar upon roar and peal upon peal, like the booming of heavy batteries, and anon crashed and rattled with a sharper, nearer sound. Blinding lightning, torrential rain, war of thunder and tempestuous waters, were all as nothing to these sons of fire. Their spirits rose amidst hurricane or thunder-storm; they

were full of life and gaiety while the cockleshell canoes were being tossed upon the short, choppy sea, like forest leaves upon a forest brook, and when every sudden gust threatened destruction. They laughed at peril, and insisted upon having the canoes out when their native followers saw danger riding on the wind and death brooding over the waters. They met the spirit of murder, and were not afraid. They lay down to sleep in the midst of an unknown wilderness, with savage beasts lurking in the darkness that surrounded their tents. They forded rivers that swarmed with crocodiles—horrible stealthy creatures, swimming deep down below the surface of the water, the placid, beautiful water, with lotus flowers sleeping in the sunlight, and scaly monsters waiting underneath in the shadow.

Panther, crocodile, tempest, fever, or sun-stroke, poisoned arrows from murderous foes, were only so many varieties in the story of adventure. Through every vicissitude the ready wit and calm courage of the Englishmen rose superior to accident, discomfort, or danger; and

to the native temper these wanderers from a far country, an island which they had heard of as a speck in a narrow sea, seemed men of iron with souls of fire.

Geoffrey would admit no malingering, would accept no idle pretexts for inaction or delay. His little band, picked out from the ruck of their porters, were always on the move, save in those rainy interludes which made movement impossible; and even then Geoffrey fretted and fumed, and was inclined to question the impracticability of a hunting expedition through those torrential rains.

“Did you ever hear of a fox-hunter stopping at home because of a wet day?” he asked Cecil Pattrington, impatiently.

“Did you ever see such rain as this in a fox-hunting country?” retorted Pattrington, pointing through an opening in the door of the hut to the sheet of falling water, which blotted out all beyond, and splashed with a thud into the pool that filled the enclosure.

The deep eaves kept the rain out of the huts,

but not without occasional accident—spoilt provisions, damp gunpowder. It was a rude awakening from dreams of home to find one's bed afloat on a pond of rising waters.

Geoffrey had taken upon himself the task of providing meat for the party, Patrington's lazy, happy-go-lucky temper readily ceding that post of distinction to the new-comer. A man who had shot every species of beast that inhabits the great continent could easily surrender the privilege of finding meat-dinners along the route; so he only used his gun when the quarry was worthy and his humour prompted; and for the most part smoked the pipe of peace and read Dickens in the repose of a day's halt, while Geoffrey roamed off with his Winchester rifle and his little band of obsequious dark-skins.

And now in this period of waiting there was the great inland sea to explore; those romantic shores with their wealth of animal life; those waters teeming with fish, hemmed round and guarded by the majesty of mountains whose lofty peaks and hollows no foot of man had

ever trodden. There was plenty of scope for movement and adventure here, so long as the rains held off; and the three men made good use of their time, and the canoes were rarely idle, or the rowers allowed to shirk upon the favourite pretence of bad weather.

So long as there was something to be done, Geoffrey and Allan were happy; but with every interval of repose there came the familiar heart-ache, the longing for home-faces, the sense of disappointment and loss.

Sometimes alone by the lake, while the lamp was shining on the faces of his two friends yonder in the verandah, where they sat playing chess, alone in the awful stillness of that vast mountain gorge, the waters rippling with placid movement, only faintly flecked with whiteness here and there in the blue distance, Geoffrey's longing for that vanished face grew to an almost unendurable agony. He felt as if he could bear this anguish of severance no more. He began to calculate the length of the homeward journey. Oh, the weariness of it! for

him for whose impatience the fastest express train would be too slow. He shrank appalled from the contemplation of the distance that he had put between himself and the woman he loved, the intolerable distance—thousands and thousands of miles—and the difficulties and vicissitudes of the journey; all the forces of tropical nature to contend with, dependent upon savages, subject to fevers that hinder and stop the eager feet, and lay the weary body low, a helpless log—to waste days and nights in burning agony—to awaken and find a caravan dwindled by desertion, luggage plundered, new impediments to progress.

Why had he been so mad as to come here? That was the question which he asked himself again and again in the stillness of night, when the mountain-peaks stood out in silvery whiteness and the mountain-chasms were pits of blackest shadow. Why had he, a free agent, master of his life and its golden opportunities, made himself a voluntary exile?

“What demon of revolt and impatience drove

me out into the wilderness, when I ought to have followed her and refused to believe in her unkindness, and insisted upon being heard, and heard again, and rejected again, only to be accepted later? Did I not know, in my heart of hearts, that she loved me? And now she will believe no more in my love. The man who could leave her, who could try to cure himself of his passion for her—such a man is unworthy to be remembered. Some one else will appear upon the scene—that unknown rival whom no man fears or foresees till the hour sounds and he is there—some arrogant lover, utterly unlike Allan or me—who will not adore her as we have adored—who will approach her not as a slave, but as a master, who will win her in a month, in a week, with fierce swift wooing, startle and scare her into loving him, win her by a *coup de main*. That is the sort of thing that will happen. It is happening now, perhaps. While I am standing by these African waters, sick with longing for her. Is it night and moonlight in England, I wonder? Are she and her new

lover walking in the old sleepy garden? No, it is winter there; they are sitting at the piano, perhaps, in the lamplight, her little hands moving about the keys—he listening and pretending to admire, knowing and caring no more about music than the coarsest of my Pagazis. Oh, it is maddening to think of how I am losing her! And I came here to cure myself of loving her. Cure! There is no cure for such a passion as mine. It grows with absence—it strengthens with time.”

And now the Masika, the dreaded rainy season began; the rain-sun burnt with a sickly oppressive heat; and over all nature there crept the deathlike silence that comes before a storm. No longer was heard the wail of the fish-eagle calling his mate, and the answering call from afar. No diver flitted, black, long, and lanky, over the waters. The big white and grey kingfisher had vanished from his perch upon the branches that overhang the lake. Even the ranæ in the sedges, noisiest of birds for the most part, were mute in anticipatory

terror. Thick darkness brooded over the long line of hills on the further side of the lake; and from Ujiji nothing could be seen but a waste of livid waters touched here and there with patches of white. Then through that dreadful stillness rolled the long low muttering of the thunder, and lightning flashes, pale and sickly, pierced the overhanging pall of night-in-day—and then the tempest, in all its majesty of terror, the roar of winds and waters, the artillery of heaven pealing, crackling, rattling, booming from yonder fortress of unseen giants, the citadel of untrodden hills.

And after the storm the rain, the ceaseless, hopeless, melancholy rain, a wall of water shutting out the world. There was nothing for it but to sit in the rough shelter of the tembe, and amuse one's self as best one might, cleaning guns and fishing-tackle, mending nets, playing cards or chess, reading, talking, disputing, execrating the enforced inaction, the deadly monotony. For Geoffrey's restless spirit that rainy season was absolute torture; and it needed

all the forbearance and good nature of his companions to bear with his irritability and fretful complaining against inexorable nature.

Even Patrington, the best-tempered, most easy-going of men, was disgusted at Geoffrey's feverish impatience.

"I begin to admire the wisdom of a vulgar proverb—two's company, three's none," he said to Allan across the chess-board, as they arranged their men, sitting in the light of the wood fire, while Geoffrey lay fast asleep in his hammock after the weariness of sleepless nights. "Your friend is a very bad traveller—a fine-weather traveller, a man who must have sport and variety and progress all along the route. That kind of man isn't a pleasant companion in Central Africa. If courage and activity are essential, patience is no less needed. Your friend has plenty of pluck; but there's too much quicksilver in his veins. He exercises an extraordinary influence upon the men; but he is just the kind of fellow to quarrel with them and get murdered by them, if he were left too

much to his own devices. It would need very little for them to think that fiddle of his an evil spirit, and smash his skull with it. On the whole, Carew, I wish you and I were alone, for with yonder gentleman," pointing to the motionless figure under the striped rug, "I feel as if I had undertaken the care of a troublesome child; and Africa, don't you know, isn't the right place for spoilt brats."

"Geoffrey will be himself again when these beastly rains are over. He's a splendid fellow, and I know you like him."

"Like him? Of course I like him. Nobody could help liking him. He has the knack of making himself liked, loved almost, but he's a crank for all that. Allan, mark my words, that young man is a crank."

Allan's heart sank at this expression of opinion, short, sharp, decisive. He remembered what he had heard of Geoffrey's birth from the lips of Geoffrey's mother. Could one expect perfect soundness of brain, perfect balance of mind and judgment in a man who had entered life in a world of dreams and hallucinations?

CHAPTER VI.

KIGAMBO.*

THE rainy season was over. The moving wall of water was down. The travellers were no longer kept awake at night by the ceaseless roar of the rain. The lake lay stretched before them, sapphire dark under the milky blueness of the tropical sky. Kingfisher and fish-eagle, and all the birds that haunt those waters, hovered, or perched on the trees or along the bank, or skimmed the shining surface of the great fresh-water sea. And now the canoes were manned, and the three white men and their followers were setting their faces towards Manyema, the cannibal country, dreaded by Wangana and Wanyamwesis, and even by the bolder Makololos.

* Kigambo: unexpected calamity, slavery, or death.

For this stage of their journey they were travelling in a stronger company, having accepted the fellowship of an Arab caravan faring towards the Congo; and this larger troop gave an air of new gaiety to their train. They had been forced to buy new stores of cloth and beads at Ujiji, Geoffrey's recklessness in rewarding his men, after every successful hunting expedition, having considerably reduced their stock. The cloth bought at Ujiji was dear and bad, and Cecil Patrington took Geoffrey to task with some severity; but his reproaches fell lightly upon that volatile nature.

"Remember that the measure of the goods we carry is the measure of our lives," said the experienced traveller gravely.

"Oh, Providence will take care of us when our goods are gone," argued Geoffrey. "We shall fall in with some civilized Arabs who know the value of hard cash. I cannot believe in a country where a cheque-book is useless. We shall be within touch of the mercantile world when we get to Stanley Pool."

“When!” echoed Patrington. “Hill and jungle, and desert and river, mutiny or desertion, pestilence and tempest, have to be accounted with before you see steamers and civilization. There’s no use in glib talk of what can be done at Brazzaville or at Stanley Pool. Luckily we are going into a region where food is cheap—such as it is. But then, on the other hand, we may run out of quinine—and quinine sometimes means life.”

Summer was in the land when they crossed the great lake, stopping for a night or two on one of the principal islands, under the hospitable roof of a missionary station, where it was a new sensation to sit upon a chair, and taste a cup of coffee made in the European manner, and to see an Englishwoman’s pleasant face and neat raiment. There was an English child also, “a real human child,” as Geoffrey exclaimed, delighted at the phenomenon—a round-limbed, fat-cheeked rosy baby, who sat and watched the landing of the party from her perambulator, and patronized them, waving

a welcome with chubby hands, as they scrambled out of the canoes—a child who had entered upon a world of black faces, and who may have fancied her mother and father monstrosities in a place where everybody else was black.

What a contrast was this blue-eyed two-year-old to such infancy as they had seen in villages along their road, the brown naked creatures rolling and grovelling in the dirt, and looking more like pug-dogs than children !

When they had bidden good-bye to the friendly missionary and his domestic circle, they were not without childish life upon their way, for the Arabs with whom they had joined company had some women in their train, one a slave with a couple of children ; and as the Arab law does not recognize slavery under adult age, these brats of six and seven were free, and not being goods and chattels, no provision was allowed for them, and the mother had to feed them out of her own scanty rations.

Geoffrey was on more familiar terms with the Arabs than either Patrington or Allan, and, on discovering the state of things with the native mother and her sons, he took these two morsels of dusky humanity into his service, and set them to clean pots and pans, and treated them as a kind of lap-dogs, and let them dance to his wild fiddle music in the firelight in front of the tents, and would not allow them to be punished for their depredations among the pannikins of rice or the baskets of bananas.

They crossed the swift and turbid Luama river, and encamped for a night upon its shores. And then came the harassing march in single file through the dense jungle—a hopeless monotony of rank foliage taller than the tallest of the travellers, a coarse and monstrous vegetation which lashed their faces and rent their clothing and caught their feet like wire snares set for poachers. Vain was it to put the porters with their loads in the forefront of the procession. The rank

inexorable jungle closed behind them as they passed; and a four-hours' march through this pitiless scrub was worse than a ten-hours' tramp in the open.

The days were sultry. The travellers deemed themselves lucky if the evening closed without a thunderstorm; and the storms in those regions were deadly. A fired roof and a blackened corpse in a hut next that occupied by the three friends testified to the awfulness of an African thunderstorm. The thatch blazed, the neighbours looked on, and the husband of the victim sat beside the disfigured form in a curious indifference, which might mean either bewilderment or want of feeling.

"Twenty years ago the catastrophe next door would have been assuredly put down to our account," said Patrington, as they sat at supper after the storm, "and we should have had to pay for that poor lady with our persons or our goods—our goods, for choice, so much merikani, or so many strings of sami sami. But since the advent of the Arabs,

reason has begun to prevail over unreason. The influence of Islam makes for civilization."

They found the people of Manyema, the reputed man-eaters, friendly, and willing to deal. Provisions were cheap. Fowls, eggs, maize, and sweet potatoes were to be had in abundance. The natives were civil, but curious and intrusive; and the sound of Geoffrey's amati was the signal for a crowd round the camping-place, a crowd that could only be dispersed by the sight of a revolver, the nature of which weapon seemed very clearly understood by these warriors of the lance and the knife. When the admiring throng waxed intrusive, and the black faces and filthy figures crowded the verandah, Cecil Patrington took out his pistols, and gave them a little lecture in their native tongue, with the promise of an illustration or two if they should refuse to depart.

Or, were Geoffrey in the humour, he would push his way, playing, through that savage throng, and, like the Pied Piper of Hamelin,

would lead those human rats away towards hill or stream, jungle or plain, playing, playing some diabolical strain of Tartini's, or some still wilder war-song of the new Slavonic school—Stojowski, Moszkowski, Wieniawski—something thrilling, plaintive, frightening, appealing, which set those savage breasts on fire, and turned those savage heads like strong drink.

“One shall be taken and the other left.” That text would flash across Geoffrey Wornock's thoughts at the unlikeliest moments. It might have been a fiery scroll projected on the dark cloud-line of the thunderous eventide. It might have been the sharp shrill cry of some bird crossing the blue above his head, so unexpectedly, so strangely did the words recur to him. So far, in all the vicissitudes of the journey, the little band had held firmly on, with less than the average amount of suffering and inconvenience. There had been desertion, there had been death among their men; but on the Unyamwesi route it had been easy

to repair all such losses, and their Wanyam-
wehis were in most respects the superiors of
the Wangana they had lost by the way.

So far, despite of some baddish bouts of fever,
the dark, inexorable Shadow had held aloof.
The dread of death had not been beside their
camp-fires or about their bed.

But now, in this region of tropical fertility,
amidst a paradise of luxuriant verdure, sheltered
by the vast mountain citadel that rises like a
titanic wall above the western border of the
Tanganyika, they came upon a spot where the
fever-fiend, the impalpable, invisible, inexorable
enemy reigned supreme. Geoffrey was the first
to feel the poisonous influence of the atmo-
sphere. He laid down his fiddle, and flung him-
self upon his bed, with aching back and weary
limbs, one evening, after a day of casual roam-
ing along the banks of a tributary stream.

"I've been walking about too long," he said.
"That's all that there is the matter with me."

"That's all!" But when daylight came he

was in the unknown fever-country, the dreadful topsy-turvy world of delirium. He had two heads, and he wanted to shoot one of them. He tried to stand up and go across the hut to fetch the rifle that hung against the opposite wall, but his limbs refused to obey him. He lay groaning, helpless as an infant, muttering that the other head wouldn't let him sleep. The pain was all in that other head. In the long agony that followed all things were blank and dark; until, after five days of raging fever, the pulse grew regular again, the scorching body cooled down to the temperature of healthy life, and weak and wan, but rejoicing in freedom from pain, the patient came back to everyday life, and looked into the faces of his companions with eyes that saw the things that were, and not the spectral forms that people delirious dreams.

“ ‘One shall be taken,’ ” he muttered to himself, as he looked from Allan to Cecil, and back again. “I thought it was I. Then we are all three of us alive?” he said, with a catch in his voice that was almost a sob.

“Very much alive, and we hope to remain so,” answered Patrington, cheeriest of travellers. “You’ve had a bad spell of the cursed mukurungu, which I suppose must have its fling for the next decade or two, until railroads, and hotels, and scientific drainage, and Swiss inn-keepers have altered the climate for the better. You’ve been pretty bad, and you’ve kept us in a very unhealthy district, so as soon as ever you’ve picked up your strength, we’ll move on.”

“I can start to-morrow morning. I feel as strong as a lion.”

“Does a lion’s paw shake as your hand is shaking now? My dear Geoff, you are as weak as water. We’ll give you three days to recruit. I am too hardened a subject for the mukurungu, which is a fever of acclimatization, for the most part, and I’ve been dosing Allan with quinine, and I’ve been doing a good deal of ambulance surgery among the natives, and we’re a very popular party. They have seldom seen three white men in a bunch. Your fiddling, my medicine-chest and sticking-plaster, and Allan’s

good manners have made a great effect. The blackies are assured that we are all three sultans in our own country."

"And our Arab friends?"

"Oh, they have gone on. We have only our own men with us now. Your Makololos have been miserable about you."

They spent a jovial night, Geoffrey's spirits rising to wild gaiety, with that lightness which comes when a fever-patient has struggled through the thick cloud of strange fancies, the agony of throbbing brain and aching back.

He tuned the fiddle that had been lying mute in its velvet nest. He tucked it lovingly under his chin, and laid his bow along the strings with light fingers that trembled a little in the rapture of that familiar touch.

"Shall I bore you very much if I play?" he asked, looking at his elder companion.

"Bore us! Not a jot. I have sadly missed your wild strains. There has been a voice wanting—a voice that is almost human, and which seems so much a part of you that while

that was dumb you seemed to be dead. Begin your spells. Play us something by one of your 'Owskis, — Jimowski, Bilowski, Bobowski — whichever you please."

Geoffrey drew his bow across the strings with a swelling chord, a burst of bass music like the sudden pealing of an organ, and began a Walachian dirge.

"Does that give you the scene?" he asked, pausing and looking round at them, after a tremendous presto movement. "Does it conjure up the funeral train, the wild wailing of the mourners, the groaning men, the shrieking women, even the whining and whimpering of the little children, the stormy sky, the thick darkness, the flare of the torches, the trampling of iron-shod hoofs? I can hear and see it all as I play." And then he began the slow movement, the awful ghostly adagio with its suggestion of all things horrible, its eccentric phrasing, and dissonant chords, shaping a vision of strange unearthly forms.

"It's a very jolly kind of music," Cecil

Patrington said thoughtfully; "I mean jolly difficult, don't you know. But if you want my candid opinion as to what it suggests, I am free to confess it sounds to me like your improvised notion of the mukurungu—all fever and pain and confusion."

"The mukurungu! Not half a bad name for a descriptive sonata!" laughed Geoffrey, putting his fiddle to bed.

And then they brought out the cards, and played poker for cowries, Cecil Patrington, as usual, the winner, by reason of that inscrutable countenance of his, which had hardened itself in all the hazards of an adventurous career. They were particularly jovial that evening, and flung care to the winds that sobbed and muttered along the shore. Geoffrey's gaiety communicated itself to the other two. They drank their moderate potations; they smoked their pipes; and Patrington discoursed of an ideal settlement where the surplus population of Whitechapel and Bermondsey were to come and work in a new Arcadia, a place of flocks

and herds and coffee-fields, under a smokeless heaven.

“For my own satisfaction, I would have Africa untrodden and unknown, a world of wonder and mystery,” he said; “but the beginning has been made, and the coming century will see every missionary settlement of to-day develop into a populous centre of enterprise and labour. Crowded-out England will come here, and thrive here, as it has thriven in less fertile lands. Englishmen will flock here for sport and pleasure and profit.”

“And these native sultans—these little kings and their peoples?”

“Ah, that is the problem! God grant there may be a bloodless solution!”

That was the last night these three travellers ever sat together over their cards and pipes, ever laughed and talked together with hearts at ease. They were to resume their journey next morning; but when all was ready for the start, Allan discovered that Cecil Patrington was too ill to walk.

“I’ve had a bad night,” he confessed; “the kind of night that lets one know one has a head belonging to one. But the men can carry me in a litter. I shall be all right to-morrow. I’d much rather we jogged along. This is a vile, feverish hole.”

There was no question of jogging along for this hardy traveller. The oppressive drowsiness, which is sometimes the first stage of malarial fever, held him like a spell. He looked at his companions dimly, with eyes that sparkled and yet were cloudy with involuntary tears. He could hardly see their anxious faces.

“I’m afraid I’m in for it,” he faltered. “I thought I was fever-proof.”

He sank upon the narrow camp-bed in a shivering fit, and Geoffrey and Allan spread their blankets over him. They heaped every woollen covering they possessed over those shaking limbs, but could not quiet the ague fit or bring warmth to the iccold form.

Dreary days, dreadful nights, followed the

sad waking of that sultry morning. The two young men nursed their guide and captain with unceasing watchfulness and devotion. Geoffrey developed a feminine tenderness and carefulness which was touching in so wild and fitful a nature. But they could do so little ! And he whom they watched and cared for knew not, or only knew in rare brief intervals, of their loving care.

They tried to sustain each other's courage. They told each other that malarial fever was only a phase of African travel ; an unpleasant phase, but not to be avoided. They knew all about the fever from bitter experience ; and here was Geoffrey but just recovered, and doubtless Patrington would mend in a day or two, as he had mended.

“I don't suppose he's any worse than I was,” said Geoffrey.

Allan shook his head sadly.

“I don't know that he's worse, but the symptoms seem different somehow. He doesn't answer to the medicines as you did.”

The symptoms developed unmistakably after this, and the fever showed itself as typhus in the most deadly form. Swift on this revelation came the end; and in the solemn stillness of the forest midnight they knelt beside the unconscious form, and watched the parched, quivering lips from which the breath was faintly ebbing. One last sobbing sigh, and between them and the captain of their little company there stretched a distance wider than the breadth of Africa, further than from the Zambesi to the Congo. A land more mysterious than the Dark Continent parted them from him who was last week their jovial, hardy comrade, sharing the fortunes of the day, thinking of death as of a shadowy something waiting for him far off, at the end of innumerable journeys and long years of adventurous activity—a quiet haven, into which his bark would drift when the timbers were worn thin with long usage, and the arms of the rower were weary of plying the oar.

And death was close beside them all the

time, lying in wait for that gallant spirit, like a beast of prey.

“O God, is there another Africa, where we shall meet that brave, good man again?” cried Allan. “Which of our modern teachers is right?—Liddon, who tells us that Christ rose from the dead; or Clifford, who tells us there is nothing—nothing: no Great Companion, no Master or Guide: only ourselves and our faithful service for one another—only this poor humanity?”

He looked up appealingly, expecting to see Geoffrey's face on the other side of the bed; but he was alone. Geoffrey had fled from the presence of death. He had rushed out into the wilderness. It was late in the following afternoon when he came back. The men had dug a grave under a great sycamore, and Allan was about to read the funeral service, when his fellow-traveller reappeared.

White, haggard, with wild eyes, and clothes stained with mire and sedge, the red clay of the forest paths, the green slime of swamp and

bog, Allan could only look at him in pitying wonder.

“Where in Heaven’s name have you been?” he asked, looking up from the rough basket-work coffin—bamboo and bulrush—interwoven by native hands.

“I don’t know. Out yonder, between the plain and the river. I was a craven to fly from the face of death—I, a soldier,” with a short, ironical laugh. “I don’t know how it was with me last night. I couldn’t bear it. I had been thinking of that verse in the gospel—‘One shall be taken,’ but I didn’t think it would be that one—the hardy, experienced traveller. It might have been you or I. Not he, Allan. It was a blow, wasn’t it?—a blow that might shake a strong man’s nerves!”

Allan stretched out his hand to his comrade in silence, and they clasped hands, heartily on Allan’s part; and his grip was so earnest that he did not know it clasped a nerveless hand.

“It was a crushing blow,” he said gravely. “I don’t blame you for being scared. You

have come back in time to see him laid in his grave, and to say a prayer with me."

Geoffrey shrugged his shoulders, with a hopeless look.

"Where do our prayers go, I wonder? We know no more than the natives, when they sacrifice to their gods. Isn't it rather feeble to go on praying when there never comes any answer? I saw you praying last night—wrestling with God in prayer, as pious people call it. I saw your forehead damp with agony, your lips writhing—every vein in your clasped hands standing out like whipcord. I watched you, and was sorry, and would have given ten years of my life to save his; but I couldn't pray with you. And, you see, there came no answer. Inexorable Nature worked out her own problem in her own way. Your prayers—my silence; one was as much use as the other. Nobody heeded us; nobody cared for us. The blow fell."

"Ah, we know not, we know not! There *is* compensation, perhaps. We shall see and know our friends in heaven, and look back and know

that we were children groping in the dark. Try to believe, Geoffrey. Belief is best."

"Belief. The pious mourner's anodyne, the Christian's patent pain-killer. Yes, belief is best; but, you see, some people can't believe. I can't. And I see only the hideous side of death—the dull horror of annihilation. A week ago we had a man with us, the manliest of men—all nerve, and fire, and brain-power, brave as a lion, ready to do and endure—and now we have only—that," with a look of heart-sickness, "which we are impatient to put out of sight for ever. Put it in the ground, Allan; fill in the grave; trample it down; let us forget that there was ever such a man."

He flung himself upon the ground and sobbed out his grief. There had been something in the blunt, dogged straightforwardness of Cecil Patrington's character which had attached this wayward nature to him with hooks of steel.

"I loved him," he muttered, getting up, calm and grave even to sullenness. "And now you and I are alone."

He stood beside the grave where native hands had gently lowered the rough coffin, and where Allan had scattered flowers and herbs, whose aromatic odours hung heavy on the still sultriness of the atmosphere. He looked at Allan, and not with looks of love.

“Only we two,” he muttered, “and these black beasts of burden.”

CHAPTER VII.

MAMBU KWA MUNGU.*

ONE had been taken. That which seemed to Geoffrey Wornock inevitable in the history of African travel had been accomplished. The Dark Continent had claimed its tribute of human life. Africa had chosen her victim. Not the expected sacrifice. She had chosen her prey in him who had dared the worst she could do—not in one pilgrimage, but in long years of travel—who had looked her full in the face and laughed at her dangers, and had wooed her with a masterful spirit, telling her that she was fair, stepping with light, careless foot over her traps and pitfalls, lying down within sound of her lions, drenched with her

* Mambu kwa mungu : "It is God's trouble."

torrential rains, tossed on her chopping seas, blinded with the fierce glare of her lightnings—always her lover, her master, her champion.

“There is no land like Africa. There is nothing in life so good as the wild, free day of the wanderer,” he had said again and again.

And now he had paid for his love with his life. He had laid himself down, like Mark Antony at the foot of his dead mistress.

He was gone, and the two young men were alone in the wide wilderness, among the mountain paths between the great lake and the far-off western sea; and in long pauses of melancholy silence by the camp-fire, or in the noon-tide rest, Geoffrey looked into the face that was like and yet not like his own, and thought of the woman they both loved, and of that duel to the death which there must needs be when two men have built all their hopes of happiness upon the love of one woman. A duel of deadly thoughts, if not of deadly weapons.

“If we go back, it will be to fight for her love,” he thought, “to fight as the wild stags in the mountains fight for the chosen hind—forehead to forehead, fore feet planted like iron, antlers locked, clashing with a sound that is heard afar off. Yes, we shall fight for her. The battle will have to begin again. We shall hate each other.”

Wakeful and unquiet in the deep, dead silence of the tropical night, he would sit outside hut or tent, mending the fire, looking listlessly at the circle of sleeping porters, listening mechanically for the qua-qua of the night-heron, or the grunt of the hippopotamus coming up from the river. The loss of Patrington's cheery companionship had wrought a dark change in Geoffrey's mind and feelings. While Patrington was with them, there had been ever-recurring distractions from sullen brooding on the inner self. Patrington was eminently a man of action, practical, matter-of-fact; and love-sick dreaming was hardly possible in his company. He was as energetic in conversation

as in action, would argue, and philosophize, and quote his master of fiction, and dose them with Pickwick and Weller as he dosed them with quinine.

He was gone ; and in the deep melancholy that had fallen upon the travellers after the sudden shock of bereavement, Geoffrey's thoughts dwelt with a maddening iteration upon one absorbing theme.

They had left the poor village of bee-hive huts, near which their comrade lay at rest under the great sycamore. They had travelled slowly, ten miles in a day at most, uphill and downhill, by jungle and swamp, too depressed for any strenuous effort, Geoffrey still weak after his attack of fever, and harassed with rheumatic aches after his night of reckless wandering in marsh and wilderness, in peril of being devoured by the panthers that abound in that region. They were not more than fifty miles from the great lake, and now they were delayed again by the illness of some of their porters, and perhaps also by their own

listlessness—the hopeless inertia that follows a great sorrow, a state of mind in which it seems not worth while to make any effort.

They had lost their captain and guide ; but they had their plans all laid down—plans discussed again and again during the rains at Ujiji. After a good deal of talk about going south to Nyassa, and back to the east coast by the Zambesi-Shire route, they had finally decided on following Trivier's route to Stanley Pool, and there to wait for the steamer. The idea of crossing the great continent from east to west pleased the younger travellers better than that notion of doubling back to the more civilized region, the Arcadia of Nyassaland, a place of Christian missions, and flocks, and herds, and prosperous homesteads, and frequent steamers.

But now life in the desert had lost its savour, and Allan and Geoffrey looked over their rough sketch-maps dully, and wished that the journey were done.

“ Wouldn't it be better to turn back and take

the easiest route, by Nyassa and the Shire ? ” Allan asked despondently.

“ No, no ; we must see the Congo. What should we do if we went back to England ? Have either you or I anything that calls us back to civilization and its deadly monotony ? ” Geoffrey asked, watching his companion’s face with eager eyes.

“ No, there is very little. My mother would be glad to see me back again. It seems hard to desert her now she is left alone. And Mrs. Wornock—her life is just as solitary—she must long for your return.”

“ Oh, she is accustomed to my rambling propensities. Yes, Lady Emily would be glad, no doubt ; and my mother would be glad ; but at our age men don’t go back to their mothers. If you have no one else to think about—if there is no other attraction ? ”

“ You know there is no one else,” Allan answered with a sigh.

The Amati was not silent in those dreary evenings, amidst the smoke of the fire that rose

up towards the rough roof of the hut, where the lizards disported themselves among the rafters and rejoiced in the warmth. The voice of the fiddle was as lugubrious as the wailings of the native women for their dead. Funeral marches; Beethoven, Chopin, Berlioz, all that music knows of sadness and lamentation, were Geoffrey's themes in that solitude of two. The music itself had an unearthly sound; and the face of the player, sharpened and wasted by illness and by grief, had an unearthly look as the firelight flashed upon it, or the shadows darkened it.

While those lonely days wore on, Allan began to have a curious feeling about his companion, the consciousness of a gulf that was gradually widening between them; a something sinister, indefinite, indescribable. It would be too much to say that he felt he was with an enemy; but he felt that he was in the presence of the unknown.

He woke one night, turning wearily on his Arab bed—the mat spread on the ground, which

use had taught him almost to like. He woke, and saw Geoffrey sitting up on his mat on the other side of the hut, his back against the wall, his eyes looking straight at Allan with an inscrutable expression. Was it dislike or was it fear that looked out of those widely opened eyes? Why fear?

“What’s the matter?” Allan asked quickly. “Have you just awakened from a bad dream?”

“No. Life is my bad dream; and there is no awakening from that. There is only the change to dreamless sleep.”

“What were you thinking about, then?”

“Life and death, and love and hate, and all things sad and strange and cruel. Do you remember Livingstone’s description of a Bechuana chieftain’s burial? His people dig a grave in his cattle-pen, and bury him there; and then they drive the cattle round and over the spot till every trace of the newly filled-in grave is obliterated. We are not as candid as the Bechuana men. We put up a statue of our great man—or, at least, we talk about

a statue; but in six months he is as much forgotten as if the cattle had pranced and trampled over his body."

"Primrose Day belies your cynicism."

"Primrose Day! A fashion as much as the November bonfire. Of all the people who wear the Beaconsfield badge three-fourths could not tell you who Beaconsfield was, or how much or how little he did for England."

"Do you remember something else in Livingstone's book, how the tribes who met him said, 'Give us sleep'? It was their prayer to the wonder-worker. Give me sleep, Geoff. I'm dead beat."

"Why, we did nothing yesterday; a beggarly eight miles."

"Perhaps it was the thunderstorm that took it out of me."

"Well, sleep away. The tribes were right. There is no better gift. Would it help you if I played a little, very softly? I have a devil to-night which only music will cast out."

“Yes, play, but don’t be too lugubrious. My heart is one great ache.”

Without moving from his mat, Geoffrey stretched a thin hand towards the fiddle-case that lay beside his pillow, opened it noiselessly and took out the Amati; then, with his haggard eyes still fixed on the reclining figure opposite him, he drew a long sobbing chord out of the strings, and began a nocturne of Chopin’s, delicatest melody played with exquisite delicacy, the very music of sleep and dreams.

“I am talking to her,” he murmured to himself softly; “across the great continent, across the great sea, over burning desert and tropical wilderness, my voice is calling to her. I am telling her the story of my heart, as I used to tell her in the dear days at Discombe, the dear unheeding days, when my bow talked to her half in sport, when I hardly knew if the wild thrill that ran along my veins meant a lifelong love.”

The music served as a lullaby for Allan, and it soothed Geoffrey, whose brain had been over-

charged with hideous fancies, as he sat up in his bed, listening to the ticking of the watch that hung against the wall, and looking at his slumbering companion.

Darkest thoughts, thoughts of what might happen if this throbbing brain of his were to lose its balance. He had been thinking of the narrow wall between reason and unreason, and of the madness that may come out of one absorbing idea. Where did a passionate love like his end and monomania begin? Was it well that they two should be alone together, with only these black beasts of burden?

He thought of one of the men, a grinning good-natured-looking animal, the best of their porters, of whom it was told that setting out on a journey with one of his wives he arrived at his destination without her. It might have been his honeymoon. He explained that wild beasts had eaten the lady; but it was known afterwards that he had killed her and chopped her up on the way. Anger, jealousy, convenience? Who knows? The man was a good

servant, and nobody cared about this episode in his career.

Was murder so easy, then? Easy to do, easy to forget?

A great horror came over him at thought of the deeds that had been done in the world by men of natures like his own; by despairing lovers, by jealous husbands, by men over whose ill-balanced minds one idea obtained the mastery. And, under the dominion of such ghastly fancies, he looked forward to the journey they two were to make, a journey that, all told, was likely to last the greater part of a year. Alone together, seeing each other's faces day after day, each thinking the same thoughts, and not daring to speak those thoughts; each with fonder and more passionate yearning as the time drew nearer when they should meet the woman they loved; each knowing that happiness for one must mean misery for the other. Friends in outward seeming, rivals and foes at heart, they were to go on journeying side by side, day after day, lying down beside the same fire night

after night, waking in the darkness to hear each other's breathing, and to know that a loaded rifle lay within reach of their hands, and that a bullet would end all their difficulties.

It was horrible.

"I was an idiot to undertake the impossible, to believe that I could be happy and at ease with this man. If I were to go home alone, she would have me," he told himself. "It was only for Allan's sake she hung back. So tender, so over-scrupulous, lest she should pain the lover she had jilted."

If he were to go home alone! Was not that possible without the suggestion of darkest iniquity? If he could go home, and gain, say half a year, before his rival reappeared upon the scene, would not that half-year suffice for the winning of his bride?

"If she loved me as I think she loved me, and if she is as noble of nature as I believe her to be, two years of severance will have tried and strengthened her love. She will love me all the dearer for my wanderings. And if Allan

is not there to remind her of his wrongs, to appeal to her too-scrupulous conscience, I shall win her."

To go back alone, to divide their resources, to divide their followers, and each to set out on his own way. Useless such a parting as that; for Allan might be the first to tread on English soil, the first to clasp Suzette's hands in the gladness of friends who meet after long absence.

"If he were to be the first, she might deceive herself in the joy of seeing a familiar face, and think she loved him, and give him back her promise in a fit of penitent affection. There are such nice shades in love. She must have had a certain fondness for him. It might revive were I not there—revive and seem enough for happiness. I must be first! I must be first, and alone in the field."

He hated himself for the restless impatience which had made him join fortunes with Allan. What had he to do with the rejected lover, he who knew that he was loved?

They crept slowly on. Allan was ailing, and unable to stand the fatigue of a long march through a close and difficult country. That week of watching beside Patrington's sick-bed, and the agony of losing that kindly comrade, had shattered his nerves and reduced his physical strength almost as much as an actual illness could have reduced him. He felt the depressing influence of the climate as the days grew more sultry and the thunderstorms more frequent. All the spirit and all the pleasure seemed to have vanished out of the expedition since the digging of that grave under the sycamore.

Their day's journey dwindled and their halts grew longer. At the rate they were now travelling it would take them a year to reach the Falls. They had left Ujiji more than a month, and they were still a long way to the east of Kassongo, the busy centre of Arab commerce and population, where they could make any purchases they wanted, refit for the rest of their journey, or, perhaps, make a contract

with the mighty Tippoo, who would provide them with men and food till the end of the land journey for a lump sum. While Patrington lived they had looked forward to the halt at Kassongo with keen interest; but now zest and pleasurable curiosity were gone, and a dull lassitude weighed like an actual burden upon both travellers. Both were alike spiritless; and even Geoffrey's raids in quest of meat were neither so frequent nor so far afield as they had been, and his men began to lose something of their admiration for him. He was growing over-fond of that kri-kri of his, over-fond of sitting at the door of his tent talking with that curious, tricksy spirit, now drawing forth sobbing cries like funeral dirges, now with frisking, flickering touch that danced and flashed across the strings, with hand as rapid as light, with fingers that flew, and eyes that flashed fire.

These wild dances were grasshoppers, he told them; and when he began the wailing music that thrilled and pained them, his Makololos

would lie down at his feet and entreat him to change it to a grasshopper.

“We hate him when he cries,” they said of the fiddle. “We love him when he leaps and dances.”

“And you would follow him and me anywhere across the land?” Geoffrey asked, laughing down at the brown faces.

“Anywhere, if you promise us your guns at the end of the journey.”

Two days later Allan succumbed to the feeling of prostration which had been growing upon him during the last four or five stages of the journey, and confessed himself unable to leave the native hut in which they had camped at sunset.

It was in the freshness of dawn. The mists were creeping off the manioc fields, and the wide stretches of tropical foliage beyond the patch of rude cultivation. The brown figures were moving about in the pearly light, women fetching water, children sprawling on the rich red earth, their plump shining bodies only a

little browner than the soil, happy in their nakedness and dirt, placid and unashamed. The porters were shouldering their loads, the lean, long-legged mongrels were yelping, the frogs croaking their morning hymn to the sun.

“I’m afraid it’s hopeless,” Allan faltered, as he leant against one of the rough supports of the verandah, wiping the moisture from his forehead. “I’m dead beat. I can’t go on unless you carry me in a litter; and that’s hardly worth while with our small following. You’d better go on to Kassongo, Geoff, and leave me here till I’m able to follow. If I don’t turn up within a few days of your arrival, you can get the chief to send some of his men to fetch me, with a donkey, if there’s one to be had. The villagers will take care of me in the mean time. It isn’t fever, you see,” holding out his cold moist hand to his friend. “It’s not the mukunguru this time. I’m just dead beat, that’s all. There’s no good fighting against hard fact, Geoff. *Mambu kwa mungu*—it is God’s trouble! One must submit to the inevitable.”

Geoffrey looked at him curiously.

“Leave you to these savages in the Manyema country? No; that would be a beastly thing to do,” he said, with his cynical laugh. “I’m not quite bad enough for that, Allan. How do I know they wouldn’t eat you? They’ve been civil enough so far, but I believe it’s because of my fiddle. They take me for a medicine-man, and my little Amati for a capricious devil that can give them toki if they don’t act on the square. I won’t leave you—like that; but I’ll tell you what I’ll do. We’ll divide forces for a bit. I’ll leave you the larger party, and I and my Makololos will go and look for big game.”

Allan crept into the hut and sank down upon his mat while his comrade was talking. He had hardly strength to answer him. He lay there white and dumb, while Geoffrey spread the blanket over him, and wiped his forehead with a silk handkerchief.

“Do what you like, Geoff,” he murmured, “and do the best for yourself. I don’t want to spoil your sport.”

He turned his body towards the wall, with an obvious effort, as if his limbs were made of lead, and presently sank into a sleep which seemed almost stupor.

“My God!” muttered Geoffrey, looking down at him, “is he going to die? Can death come like that, as if in answer to a wicked wish?”

He went out and talked to the men, giving them stringent orders as to what they were to do for the sick Musungu. He was going on a shooting expedition with only four men—the rest, a round dozen, would remain with the other Musungu, and nurse him, and take care of him, and obey his orders when he was well enough to move; and, above all, not attempt robbery or desertion, as they—the two Musungus—had letters from the Sultan of Zanzibar to Nzigue, the Arab chief at Kassongo, and any evil treatment would be bitterly expiated. “You know how small account the white Arabs make of a black man’s life,” he concluded.

Yes, they knew.

He went back to the hut, and to the store of

quinine and other drugs, and he prepared such doses as it would be well for Allan to take at fixed periods ; and then he instructed the leader of the porters—a Zanzibari, who had been with Burton, and afterwards with Stanley—as to the treatment of the sick man. He was to do this, and this, once, twice, thrice, between sunrise and sundown, the division of the day by hours not having yet been revealed to these primitive minds.

“ Say, how often are you hungry in the day, and how often do you eat ? ”

“ Three times.”

“ Then every time you are hungry, and before you sit down to eat, you will give the Musungu his medicine—one of the powders, as I put them ready for you—mixed with water, as he has often given them to you. And if you forget, or don’t care to give him his medicine, evil will come to you—for I shall put a spell upon the door, and wicked spirits will hurt you if you don’t obey me.”

After this he called his Makololos and one of

the Wanyamwesis, for whom he had shown a liking, and who worshipped him with a slavish subjugation of all personal will-power. He told them he was going on a hunting expedition that might last many days—and they must take baggage enough to assure themselves against being left to starve upon the way. He counted the bales of cloth, the bags of beads, brass-headed nails, brass wire; and he set apart about a fourth of the whole stock; and with these stores he loaded his men. And so in the full blaze of the morning sun this little company went out into the jungle, turning their faces eastward, towards the mountains that rose between them and the sea of Ujiji.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHERE THE BURDEN IS HEAVIEST.

THE deep-toned organ pealed through the empty manor-house in the gloom of a rainy summer afternoon. Not once in the long dull day had the sun looked through the low, dull sky ; and Mrs. Wornock, always peculiarly sensible of every change in the atmosphere, felt that life was just a little sadder and emptier than it had been for her in all the long slow years of a lonely widowhood.

What had she to live for ? The brief romance of her girlhood was all she had ever known of the love which for most women means a life history. For her it had been only the beginning of a chapter—ending in self-sacrifice, as blind and piteously faithful to duty as Abraham's

obedience to the Divine command. And after all those years of fond fidelity to a memory, she had seen her lover again—once for a few minutes—by stealth, through an open window, undreamt of by him.

What had she to live for? A son whose restless spirit would not allow him to be her companion and friend—in whose feverish life she was of so little value that he could leave her for a pilgrimage to Central Africa, with a brief good-bye; as if it were a small thing for mother and son to live with half the world between them. It seemed to her sometimes, brooding upon the past year, that Allan Carew had cared for her more, was more in sympathy with her, than that very son—as if some hereditary sentiment, some mystic link with the father who had loved her, brought the son nearer to her heart.

And now they were both so distant that she thought of them almost as mournfully as if they were dead. Dark clouds of trouble hung over their forms, as she tried to see them in that

far-off world, ever impending dangers which haunted her in her dreams, until the words of St. Paul burnt themselves into her brain, and she would awake from some dream of horror, hearing her own voice, with that awful sound of the dreamer's voice, repeating—

“In journeyings . . . in perils of waters, in perils of robbers . . . in perils by the heathen . . . in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea . . . in weariness and painfulness . . . in hunger and thirst.”

Suzette had been absent for nearly a year, and Suzette's absence had increased the sense of loss and deepened the gloom of the rambling old house, and those picturesque gardens, where the girl's bright face and graceful figure flitting in and out from arch to arch, between the walls of ilex or yew, had been a living gladness that seemed only a natural accompaniment to spring flowers, sulphur butterflies, and the deepening purple of the beeches, in the joyous awakening of the year. But Suzette had returned from

her travels nearly a year since, and had taken up the thread of life again, and with it her old friendship for Mrs. Wornock, feeling herself secure from the risk of all violent emotions in her friend's house, now that Geoffrey was a good many thousand miles away.

Suzette had brought comfort to the lonely life. Together she and Mrs. Wornock had read books of African travel, explored maps, and followed the route of the travellers. General Vincent was a fellow of the Geographical Society, and the monthly report issued by that society kept his daughter informed of the latest progress in the history of exploration, while the Society's library was at her disposal for books of travel. It seemed to Suzette in that quiet year after her home-coming that she read nothing but African books, and began almost to think in the Swahili language—picking up words in every chapter, till they became as familiar as French phrases in a society novel.

She was quieter than of old, people said : less interested in golf : caring nothing for a church

bazaar which was the one absorbing topic in that particular summer; wrapped up in her musical studies, and practising a great deal too much, as officious friends informed General Vincent.

“Suzette must do what she likes,” he said; “she has always been my master.”

But egged on by the same officious friends, he bought his daughter a horse, and insisted on her riding with him, and they went for long rides over the downs, and sometimes were lucky enough to fall in with the hawks, and see a few innocent rooks slaughtered high up in the blue of an April sky.

He shrank from questioning his daughter about the young men who were gone. She had been very ill—languid, and white, and wan, and spiritless—when he carried her off to Germany, and had required a good deal of patching up before she became anything like the happy, active, high-spirited Suzette of the Indian hills—who had charmed everybody, old and young, by her bright prettiness and joy in

life. German waters, German woods and hills, followed by a winter on the Riviera, and a long holiday by the Italian lakes, had set her up again; and General Vincent was content to wait till time should unravel the mystery of a maiden's heart.

"Those young men will come back," he told his sister; "and then I shouldn't wonder if Geoffrey were to renew his offer—and to be accepted; for since she gave Allan the sack without any provocation, I conclude it's Geoffrey she cares for."

"I wash my hands of her and her love affairs," Mrs. Mornington retorted waspishly. "She might have married Allan—a young man who adored her—and a very good match. *Very* good now his father's gone. She jilted Allan—one would suppose solely because she was in love with Geoffrey. Oh dear no! She refuses Geoffrey, and sends two excellent young men—each an only son, with a stake in the country—to bake themselves black in a wilderness where they will very likely be eaten after

they are baked. I have no patience with her."

"Don't be cross, Molly. There's no use worrying about her lovers. Thank God she has recovered her health, and is my own sweet little girl still."

"Sweet little fiddlestick, coquette, weathercock, jilt! That's what she is."

"Take my word for it. Wornock will come back again when he's tired of Africa—and propose again."

"Not if he has a grain of sense. Young men don't come back to girls who treat them badly."

The General took things easily. He had his daughter, and his daughter would be comfortably provided for when his day was done. He was more than content with the present arrangement of things; and he felt that Providence had been very good to him.

Suzette came in upon Mrs. Wornock's loneliness that rainy afternoon like a sudden burst of sunlight; so fresh, after her walk through the

rain, so daintily neat in the pretty blue-and-white pongee frock which her waterproof cloak had preserved from all harm.

“I did not think you would come to-day, dear!”

“Did you think the rain would frighten me? The walk was lovely in spite of a persistent drizzle, the woods are so fresh and sweet, and every little insignificant wild-flower sparkles like a jewel. I have a tiny bit of news for you.”

“Not bad news?”

“No, I hope not. Lady Emily is at Beechhurst. She came late last night. The cook at the Vicarage saw her arrive, and Bessie Edgefield told me this morning. Do you think it means that Allan is expected home?”

“And Geoffrey with him? Would to God it meant that! I am getting very weak Suzette, weary to death. My anxiety is like a wearing, physical pain. It is so long since we have heard anything of them.”

“Yes, it seems very long!” Suzette murmured, soothingly.

“It is very long—quite four months since I had Geoffrey’s last letter!”

“Do you think it is really as much as that?”

“I know it is—and there is the post-mark to convince you,” glancing at the secretaire where she kept those treasured letters. “Geoffrey seldom dates a letter. I have read this last one again and again and again. They were at Ujiji—the place seemed almost civilized, as he described it; but they were to cross the lake later on—the great lake, like an inland sea—to cross in an open boat. How do I know that they were not drowned in that crossing? He told me the natives were afraid of going on the lake in a storm. And he is so foolhardy, so careless of himself! He may have over-persuaded them——”

“Hark!” cried Suzette, “a visitor! What a day for callers to choose! They must really wish to find you at home.”

There was the usual delay caused by the leisurely stroll of a footman from the servants’

quarters to the hall-door, and then the door of the music-room was opened, and the leisurely butler announced Lady Emily Carew.

Lady Emily shook hands with Mrs. Wornock, with a clinging, almost affectionate air, and allowed herself to be led to an easy-chair near the hearth where some logs were burning, to give a semblance of cheerfulness amidst the prevailing grey of the outside world. There was a marked contrast in the lady's greeting of Suzette, to whom she vouchsafed no handshake, only the most formal salutation. The mother of an only son, whom she deems perfection, cannot easily forgive the girl who goes near to breaking his heart.

"I was so surprised to hear you were at Beechhurst," said Mrs. Wornock. "I hope you bring good news—that the travellers are nearing home."

Lady Emily could hardly answer for her tears.

"Indeed, no," she said piteously. "My news is very bad; I could not rest at home. I

thought you might have heard lately from Mr. Wornock——”

“My latest letter is four months old.”

“Ah, then you can tell me nothing. Allan has written later. He wrote the night before they left Ujiji——”

“But the news—the bad news? What was it?”

“Very, very bad. They are alone now—our sons—alone among savages—in an unknown country—friendless, helpless. What is to become of them?”

“But Mr. Patrington—surely he has not deserted them?”

“No, no, poor fellow; he would never have deserted them. He is dead. He died of fever. The news of his death was cabled to his brother by Allan. The message came from Zanzibar; but he died on his way from the Lake to Kassongo. That was Allan’s message. Died of fever on the journey to Kassongo. Allan’s last letter was from Ujiji. They were all well when he wrote, and in good spirits, looking forward to the

journey down the Congo ; and now their leader is dead, the man who knew the country ; and they are alone, helpless, and ignorant."

"They are men," Suzette flashed out indignantly, her eyes sparkling with tears. "They will fight their way through difficulties like men of courage and resource. I don't think you need be frightened, Mrs. Wornock ; nor you, Lady Emily."

"It is very good of you to console me, Miss Vincent," replied Allan's mother ; "but if you had known your mind a little better, my son need never have gone to Africa."

"I am sorry you should think me so much to blame ; but what would you have thought of me if I had not told Allan the truth ?"

"Well, you have sent him away—and he is dead, perhaps—dead in the wilderness—of fever, like poor Cecil Patrington."

Suzette bowed her head, and was silent under this reproof. She could feel for the mother, and was content to bear unmerited blame. She went to the organ, and occupied herself in

putting away the scattered sheets of music, with that deft neatness which, in her case, was an instinct.

The two mothers sat side by side, and talked, and wept together. They could but speculate upon the condition and the whereabouts of the wanderers. Those few words from Zanzibar told them so little. Cecil Patrington's elder brother had written to Lady Emily enclosing a copy of the message, with a polite hope that her son would find his way safely home. There was no passionate grief among his relations at home for the wanderer who lay in his final halting-place under the great sycamore. Long years of absence had weakened family ties; and the head of the house of Patrington was a busy country squire, with an increasing family and a diminishing rent-roll.

Suzette put on her hat and wished Mrs. Wornock good-bye. She would have left with only a little bend of the head to Lady Emily; but that kindly matron had repented herself of her harshness, and held out her hand with

a pathetic look which went straight to the girl's heart.

"Forgive me for what I said just now," she pleaded. "I am almost beside myself with anxiety. You were not to blame. Truth is always the best. But my poor Allan was so fond of you, and you and he might have been so happy—if you had only loved him."

"I did love him—once," faltered Suzette. "But later it seemed as if my love were not enough—not enough for a lifetime."

"Ah, but there was some one else—we know, Mrs. Wornock—some one who is like my poor son, but cleverer, handsomer, more fascinating. It was Mr. Wornock's return that changed you——"

"No, no, no!" Suzette protested eagerly. "If it had been, I might have acted differently. Please don't talk about me and my folly—not to know myself or my own heart. They are both away. God grant they are well and happy, and enjoying the beauty and the strangeness of that wonderful country. Why should they

not be safe and happy there? Think how many years Mr. Patrington had spent in Africa before the end came. Why should they not be as safe as Cameron, Stanley, Trivier?"

Her heart sank even as she argued in this consoling strain, remembering how with Stanley, with Cameron, with Trivier there was one left behind. But here, perhaps, the Fates were already appeased. One had fallen by the way. The sacrifice had been made to the cruel goddess of the dark land.

"Will you come to Beechhurst with me, Suzette?" pleaded Allan's mother. "It would be so kind if you would come and stay with me till to-morrow morning. I shall leave by the first train to-morrow. I want to be at home again, to be there when Allan's letter comes. There must be a letter soon. It is so lonely at Beechhurst. I think General Vincent could spare you for just one night?"

Suzette proposed that Lady Emily should dine at Marsh House; but she seemed to take a morbid pleasure in her son's house in spite

of its loneliness, so Suzette drove back to Matcham with her, took her to tea with the General, and obtained his permission to dine and sleep at Beechhurst, and did all that could be done by unobtrusive kindness and attention to console and cheer Allan's mother.

CHAPTER IX.

ALL IN HONOUR.

IT was nearly a month after Lady Emily's appearance at Discombe, and there had been no letter from Geoffrey. Every day had increased Mrs. Wornock's anxiety, and in the face of an ever-growing fear there had been a tacit avoidance of all mention of the absent son, both on the part of his mother and of Suzette. They had talked of music, of the gardens, of the poor, and of the latest developments in that science of the supernatural in which Mrs. Wornock's interest had never abated, and in which her faith had never been entirely shaken.

Once, in the midst of discussing the last

number of the *Psychical Magazine* with Suzette—a sad sceptic—she said quietly—

“Whatever has happened, I know he is not dead. I must have seen him. I must have known. There would have been some sign.”

Suzette was silent. Not for worlds would she have dashed a faith which buoyed up the fainting spirit. Yet it needed but some dreadful dream, she reflected, a dead face seen amidst the clouds of sleep, to change this blind confidence into despair.

It was in the evening following this conversation that Suzette was sitting at her piano alone in her own drawing-room, playing from memory, and losing herself in the web of a Hungarian nocturne, which was to her like thinking in music—the composer’s learned sequences and changes of key seeming only a vague expression of her own sadness. Her father was dining out—a man’s dinner—a dissipation he rarely allowed himself; and Suzette was relieved from her evening task of playing chess, reading aloud, or listening to tiger-stories,

which had lost none of their interest from familiarity, the fondly loved father being the hero of every adventure.

She was glad to be alone to-night, for her heart was full of dread of the news which the next African letter might bring. She had tried to make light of the leader's death; yet she, too, thought with a shudder of the two young men alone, inexperienced, and one of them, at least, reckless and daring even to folly.

The wailing Hungarian reverie with its minor modulations seemed to shape itself into a dream of Africa, the endless jungle, the vastness of swamp and river, the beauty and the terror of gigantic waterfalls, huge walls of water, a river leaping over a precipice into a gulf of darkness and snow-white foam. The scenes of which she had been reading lately crowded into her mind, and filled it with aching fears.

“Suzette!”

A voice called to her softly from the open window. She looked up, trembling and cold with an awful fear. His voice—Geoffrey's—

a spectral voice ; the voice of a ghost calling to her, the unbeliever, from the other side of the world—calling in death, or after death, to the woman the living man had loved.

She rose, with a faint scream, and rushed to the window, and was clasped in the living Geoffrey's arms, on the threshold, between the garden and the room. Had she flung herself into his arms in her fear and great surprise ? or had he seized her as she ran to him ? She could not tell. She knew only that she was sobbing on his breast, clasped in two gaunt arms, which held her as in a grasp of iron.

“ Geoffrey, Geoffrey ! Alive and well ! What delight for your poor mother ! Was she not wild with happiness ? ” she asked, when he released her, after a shower of kisses upon forehead and lips, which she pretended to ignore.

She could not begin quarrelling with him in these first moments of delighted surprise.

He followed her into the room, and she saw his face in the light of the lamp on the piano

—worn, wan, haggard, wasted, but with eyes that were full of fire and gladness.

“Suzette, Suzette!” he cried, clasping her hands, and trying to draw her to his heart again, “it was worth a journey over half the world to find you! So sweet, so fair! All that my dreams have shown me, night after night, night after night! Ah, love, we have never been parted. Your image has never left me.”

“Africa has done you no good. You are as full of wild nonsense as ever,” she said, trying to take the situation lightly, yet trembling with emotion, her heart beating loud and fast, her eyes hardly daring to meet the eyes that dwelt upon her face so fondly. “Tell me about your mother. Was she not surprised—happy?”

“I hope she will be a little glad. I haven’t seen her yet.”

“Not seen—your mother?”

“No, child. A man can’t have two lode-stars. I came straight from Zanzibar to this house. I came home to *you*, Suzette.”

“But you will go to the Manor directly?”

Your poor mother has been so miserable about you. Don't lose a minute in making her happy."

"Lose! These minutes are gold; the most precious minutes of my life. Oh, Suzette, how cruel you were! Why did you drive me from you?"

She was in his arms again, held closely in those wasted arms, caught in the coils of that passionate love, she scarcely knew how. He was taking everything for granted; and she knew not how to resist him. She had no argument to offer against that triumphant love.

"Cruel, cruel, cruel Suzette! Two years of exile—two wasted lonely years—years of fond longing and looking back! Why did you send me away? No, I won't ask. It was all in honour, all in honour. My dearest is made up of honourable scruples, and delicate sympathies, which this rough nature of mine can't understand. But you loved me, Suzette. You loved me from the first, as I loved you. Our hearts went out to meet each other over the bridge of

my violin—flew out to each other in a burst of melody. And we will go on loving each other till the last breath—the last faint glimmer of life's brief candle. Ah, love, forgive me if I rave. I am beside myself with joy."

"I think you are a little out of your mind," she faltered.

She let him rave. She accepted the situation. Ah, surely, surely it was this man she loved. It was this eager spirit which had passed like a breath of fire between her and Allan; this masterful nature which had possessed itself of her heart, as of a mere chattel that must needs be the prize of the strongest. She submitted to the tyranny of a love which would not accept defeat; and presently they sat down side by side in the soft lamplight, close to the piano which she loved only a little less than if it were human. They sat down side by side, his arm still round the slim waist, plighted lovers.

"Poor Allan!" she sighed, with a remorseful pang. "Has he gone down to Suffolk?"

“To Suffolk? He is on the Congo—past Stanley Falls, I hope, by this time.”

“On the Congo! You have left him! Quite alone! Oh, Geoffrey, how could you?”

“Why not? He is safe enough. He knows the country as well as I. I left him near Kas-songo, where he could get as big a train and as many stores as he wanted; though we have done nowadays with long trains, armies of porters, and a mountainous load of provisions.”

“What will Lady Emily say? She will be dreadfully unhappy. I could not have believed you and Allan would part company—after Mr. Patrington’s death.”

“Why not? We were both strangers in the land. He knows how to take care of himself as well as I do.”

“But two men—companions and friends—surely they would be safer than one Englishman travelling alone?” said Suzette, deeply distressed at the thought of what Allan’s mother would suffer when she knew that her son’s comrade had left him.”

“Do you think two men are safer from fever, poisoned arrows, the bursting of a gun, the swamping of a canoe? My dearest, Allan is just as safe alone as he was when he was one of three. He had learnt a good deal about the country, and he knew how to manage the natives, and he had stores and ammunition, and the means of getting plenty more. Don't let me see that sweet face clouded. Ah, my love, my love, I shall never forget your welcoming smile—the light upon your face as you ran to the window. I had always believed in your love—always—even when you were cruellest; but to-night I know—I know that I am the chosen one.”

He let his head sink on her shoulder, and nestled against her, like a child at rest near his mother's heart. How could she resist a love so fervent, so resolute—a spirit like Satan's—not to be changed by place or time. It is the lover who will not be denied—the selfish, impetuous, unscrupulous lover who has always the better chance; and in a case like this it

was a foregone conclusion that he who came back first would be the winner. The first strong appeal to the heart that had been tried by absence and anxiety, the first returning wave of romantic love. It was something more than a lover's return. It was the awakening of love from a long sleep that had seemed dull and grey and hopeless as death.

"I thought you would never come back," sighed Suzette, resigning herself to the tyranny of the conqueror, content at last to be taken by a *coup de main*. "I was afraid you and Allan would be left in that dreadful country. And I had to make believe to think you as safe as if you were in the next parish. I had to be cheerful and full of hopefulness, for your mother's sake. Your poor mother," starting up suddenly. "Oh, Geoffrey, how cruel that we should be sitting here while she is left in ignorance of your return; and she has suffered an agony of fear since she heard of poor Mr. Patrington's death. It is shameful! You must go to her this instant."

“Must I, my queen and mistress?”

“This instant. It will be a shock to her—even in the joy of your return—to see how thin and haggard you have grown. What suffering you must have gone through!”

“Only one kind of suffering—only one malady, Suzette. I was sick for love of you. Love made me do forced marches; love kept me awake of nights. Impatience was the fever that burnt in my blood—love and longing for you. Yes, yes, I am going,” as she put her hand through his arm and led him to the window. “I will be at my mother’s feet in half an hour, kneeling to ask for her blessing on my betrothal. There will be double joy for her, Suzette, in my home-coming and my happiness. I left her a restless, unquiet spirit. I go back to her tamed and happy.”

“Yes, yes, only go! Remember that every minute of her life of late has been a minute of anxiety. And she loves you so devotedly, Geoffrey. She has only you to love.”

“I am going; but not till you have told me how soon, Suzette.”

“How soon—what?”

“Our marriage.”

“Geoffrey, how absurd of you to talk about that, when I hardly know that we are engaged.”

“I know it. We are bound and plighted as never lovers were, to my knowledge, since Romeo and Juliet. How long did Romeo wait, Suzette? Twenty-four hours, I think. I shall have to wait longer—for a special licence.”

“Geoffrey, unless you hurry away to the Manor this instant, I will never speak civilly to you again.”

“Why, what a fury my love can be! What an exquisite termagant! Yes, I will wait for the licence. Come to the gate with me, Suzette.”

They went through the dusky garden to the old-fashioned five-barred gate which opened on to a circular drive. The night was cool and grey, and the white bloom of a catalpa tree gleamed ghost-like among the dark masses

of the shrubbery. A bat wheeled across the greyness in front of the lovers, as they kissed and parted.

“Until I can get the licence,” he repeated, with his happy laugh. “We’ll wait for nothing else.”

“You will have to wait for me,” she answered, tossing up her head, and running away, a swift white figure, vanishing in the bend of the drive as he stood watching her.

“Thank God !” he ejaculated. “The reward is worth all that has gone before.”

CHAPTER X.

“AM I HIS KEEPER?”

BEFORE the sun had gone down upon the second day after Geoffrey's return, his engagement to Miss Vincent had become known to almost every member of Matcham society who had any right to be posted in the proceedings of the *élite*.

Mrs. Mornington, dropping in at her brother's house after breakfast, and before her daily excursion to the village, was transformed into a statue of surprise on the very threshold of the hall at hearing fiddling in her brother's drawing-room, unmistakably fiddling of a superior order; a fiddle whose grandiose chords rose loud and strong above the rippling notes of a piano—a quaint old melody of Porpora's,

in strongly marked common time—a fairy-like accompaniment of delicate treble runs, light as a gauzy veil flung over the severe outlines of a bronze statue.

“She must be having accompanying lessons,” thought Mrs. Mornington. “Some fiddler from Salisbury, I suppose.”

She marched into the drawing-room with the privileged unceremoniousness of an aunt, and found Geoffrey Wornock standing beside the piano, at which Suzette was sitting fresh as a rose, in a pale green frock, that looked like the calix of a living flower.

“Home!” cried Mrs. Mornington, with a step backward, and again becoming statuesque; “and I have been picturing you as eaten by tigers, or tomahawked by savages!”

“The African tiger is only a panther, and there are no tomahawks,” answered Geoffrey, laying down his bow, and going across the room to shake hands with Mrs. Mornington, the Amati still under his chin.

“And Allan? Where is Allan?”

“I left him on his way to the Congo.”

“You left him!—came back without him?”

“Yes. He wanted to extend his travels—to cross Africa. I was not so ambitious. I only wanted to come home.”

His smile, as he turned to look at Suzette, told the astute matron all she desired to know.

“So,” she exclaimed, “is the weathercock nailed to the vane at last?”

“The ship which has been tossing so long upon a sunless sea, is safe in her haven,” answered Geoffrey.

Mrs. Mornington’s keen perceptions took a swift review of the position. A much better match than poor Allan! Discombe, with revenues that had accumulated at compound interest during a long minority, must be better than Beechhurst, a mere villa, and an estate in Suffolk of which Mrs. Mornington knew very little except that it was hedged in and its glory overshadowed by the lands of a Most Noble and a Right Honourable or two. Discombe! The Squire of Discombe was a personage in that

little world of Matcham; and the world of Matcham was all on the earthward side of the universe for which Miss Mornington cared.

Suzette's shilly-shallying little ways had answered admirably, it seemed, after all. How wisely Providence orders things, if we will only fold our hand and wait.

"Don't let me interrupt your musical studies, young people," exclaimed the good lady. "I only came to know if Suzette was going to the golf-ground."

"Of course I am going, auntie, if you are walking that way and want company."

It was the kind of day on which only hat and gloves are needed for outdoor toilette; and Suzette's neat little hat was ready for her in the hall. They all three went off to the links together, along the dusty road and through the busy little village—busy just for one morning hour—and to the common beyond, the long stretch of common that skirted the high-road, and which everybody declared to have been created on purpose for golf.

Mrs. Mornington talked about Allan nearly all the way—her regret that he had extended his travels, regret felt mostly on his mother's account.

“I think he always meant to cross from sea to sea,” Geoffrey answered carelessly. “His mother ought to have been prepared for that. He read Trivier's book, and that inspired him. And really crossing Africa means very little nowadays. One's people at home needn't worry about it.”

“Mr. Patrington did not find it so easy.”

“Poor Patrington! No; he was unlucky. There is no reckoning with fever. That is the worst enemy.”

“Did you bring home a letter for Lady Emily?”

“No. Allan wrote from Ujiji. That letter would reach England much quicker than I could.”

“But you will go to see her, I dare say. No doubt it would be a comfort to her to talk to you about her son—to hear all those details which letters so seldom give.”

“I will go if she ask me. Suzette has written to tell her of my return.”

“She will ask you, I am sure. Or she may come to Beechhurst, as she came only a month ago, in the hope of hearing of Allan’s movements from your letters to your mother.”

“I was never so good a correspondent, or so good a son, as Allan.”

They were at the golf-ground by this time, and here Mrs. Mornington left them; and meeting five of her particular friends on the way, told them how a strange thing had happened, and that Geoffrey Wornock, who had left England broken-hearted because Suzette had rejected him, had come back suddenly from Africa, and had been accepted.

“He took her by storm, poor child! But, after all, I believe she always preferred him to poor Allan.”

There seemed nothing wanting now to Mrs. Wornock’s happiness. Her son had returned, not to restlessness and impatience, not to weary

again of his beautiful home, but to settle down soberly with a wife he adored.

His mother was to live with him always. The Manor House was still to be her home, the music-room her room, the organ hers. In all things she was to be as she had been—plus the son she loved, and the daughter-in-law she would have chosen for herself from all the daughters of earth.

“If it were not that I am sorry for Allan, there would not be a cloud in my sky,” she told her son, on the second night after his return, when he had quieted down a little from that fever of triumphant gladness which had possessed him after his conquest of Suzette.

“Dear mother, there is no use in being sorry for Allan. We could not both be winners. To be sorry for him is to grudge me my delight; and I could easily come to believe that you are fonder of Allan than of me.”

“Geoffrey!”

“Well, I’ll never say so again if you’ll only leave off lamenting about Allan. He will have

all the world before him when he comes back to England. Somewhere, no doubt there are love and sympathy, and beauty and youth waiting for him. When he knows that Suzette has made her choice, he will accept the inevitable, and fall in love with somebody else—not at Matcham.”

There was the faintest touch of irritation in his reply. That incessant reference to Allan began to jar upon his nerves. Wherever he went, he had to answer the same questions—to explain how he wanted to come home and Allan wanted to go further away; and how for that reason only they had parted. He began to feel like Cain, and to sympathize with the first murderer.

But the worst was still to come. In the midst of a sonata of De Beriot’s—long, brilliant, difficult—a *tour de force* for Suzette, whose fingers had not grappled with such music within the last two years, the door of the music-room was opened, and Lady Emily Carew was announced, just as upon that grey afternoon a month ago.

“Forgive me for descending upon you again in this way,” she said hurriedly to Mrs. Wornock, who came from her seat by the window to receive the uninvited guest. “I couldn’t rest after I received Miss Vincent’s letter.”

Nothing could have been colder than the “Miss Vincent,” except the stately recognition of Suzette with which it was accompanied. “Mr. Wornock”—turning to Geoffrey, without even noticing his mother’s outstretched hand—“why did you leave my son?”

“I thought Suzette had told you why we parted. He wished to go on. I wanted to come home. Is there anything extraordinary in that?”

“Yes. When two men go to an uncivilized country, full of dangers and difficulties, and when the third, their guide and leader, has been snatched away—surely it is very strange that they should part; very cruel of the one whose stronger will insisted upon parting.”

“If you mean to imply that I had no right to come back to England without your son, I

can only answer that you are very unjust. If you were a man, Lady Emily, I might be tempted to express my meaning in stronger language.”

“Oh, it is easy enough for you to answer me, if you can satisfy your own conscience; if you can answer to yourself for leaving your friend and comrade helpless and alone.”

“Was he more helpless than I? We parted in the centre of Africa. If I chose the easier and shorter route homeward, that route was just as open to him as to me. It was his own choice to go down the Congo River. No doubt his next letter, whenever it may reach you, will tell you all you can want to know as to his reasons for taking that route. When I offered myself as your son’s companion, I accepted no apprenticeship. I was tired of Africa; he wasn’t. There was no compact between us. I was under no bond to stay with him. He may choose to spend his life there, as Cecil Patrington chose, practically. I wanted to come home.”

“Yes, to be first; to steal my son’s sweetheart!” said Lady Emily, pale with anger, looking from Geoffrey to Suzette.

“Lady Emily, you are unreasonable.”

“I am a mother, and I love my son. Till I see him, till I hear from his own lips that you were not a traitor—that you did not abandon him in danger or distress, for your own selfish ends; till then I shall not cease to think of you as I think now. Your mother will, of course, believe whatever you tell her; and Miss Vincent, no doubt, was easily satisfied; but I am not to be put off so lightly—nor your conscience, as your face tells me.”

She was gone before any one could answer her. She waited for no courtesy of leave-taking, for no servant to lead the way. Her own resolute hand opened and shut the door, before Mrs. Wornock could recover from the shock of her onslaught. Indeed, in those few moments, Mrs. Wornock had only eyes or apprehension for one thing, and that was Geoffrey’s white face. Was it anger or remorse that made him so deadly pale?

While his mother watched him wonderingly, filled with a growing fear, his sweetheart was too deeply wounded by Lady Emily's scornful speech to be conscious of anything but her own pain. She went back to her place at the piano, and bent her head over a page of music, pretending to study an intricate passage, but unable to read a single bar through her thickly gathering tears.

CHAPTER XI.

A SHADOW ACROSS THE PATH.

No more was seen or heard of Lady Emily at Matcham. Except the one fact that she had returned to Suffolk on the morning after her brief appearance at the Manor, nothing more was known about that poor lonely lady, whom adverse fate had cut adrift from all she loved. At Beechhurst closed shutters told of the master's absence; and the inquiries of the officious or the friendly elicited only the reply that Mr. Carew was still travelling in Africa, and that no letters had been received from him for a long time. He was in a country where there were no post-offices, the housekeeper opined, but she believed her ladyship heard from him occasionally.

Geoffrey's return, and the news of his engagement to Miss Vincent, made a pleasant excitement in the village and neighbourhood. An early marriage was talked about. Mr. Wornock had told the Vicar that he was going to be married in a fortnight—had spoken as if he were sole master of the situation.

“As if such a nice girl as Suzette would allow herself to be hustled into marriage without time for a trousseau,” persisted Bessie Edgefield, who assured her friends that there would be no wedding that year. “It may be in January,” she said; “but it won't be before the New Year.”

Geoffrey had pleaded in vain. He had won his sweetheart's promise; but his sweetheart was not to be treated in too masterful a fashion.

“God knows why we are waiting, or what we are waiting for,” he said, in one of those fits of nervous irritability, which even Suzette's influence could not prevent. “Hasn't my probation been long enough? Haven't I suffered enough? Haven't you kept me on

the rack of uncertainty long enough to satisfy your love of power? You are like all women; you think of a lover as a surgeon thinks of a rabbit, too low in the scale for his feelings to be considered—just good enough for vivisection.”

“Can’t we be happy, Geoffrey? We have everything in the world that we care for.”

“I can never be happy till I am sure of you. I am always dreading the moment in which you will tell me you have changed your mind.”

“I have given you my promise. Isn’t that enough?”

“No, it is not enough. You gave Allan your promise—and broke it.”

She started up from her seat by the piano, and turned upon him indignantly.

“If you are capable of saying such things as that, we had better bid each other good-bye at once,” she said. “I won’t submit to be reminded of my wrong-doing by you, who are the sole cause of it. If I had never seen you, I should be Allan’s wife this day. You came between us;

you tempted me away from him ; and now you tell me I am fickle and untrustworthy. I begin to think I have made a worse mistake in promising to be your wife than I made when I engaged myself to Allan."

"That means that you are regretting him—that you wish he were here now—in my place."

"Not in your place ; but I wish he were safe in England. It makes me miserable to be so uncertain of his fate, for his mother's sake."

"Well, he will be in England soon enough, I dare say. But you will be my wife by that time ; and I shall be secure of my prize. I shall be able to defy a hundred Allans."

And then he sat down by her side, and pleaded for her pardon, almost with tears. He hated himself for those jealous doubts which devoured him, he told her—those fears of he knew not what. If she were but his wife, his own for ever, that stormy soul of his would enter into a haven of peace. The colour of his life would be changed.

"And even for Allan's sake," he argued, "it

is better that there should be no delay. He will accept the situation more easily if he find us man and wife. A man always submits to the inevitable. It is uncertainty which kills."

He pleaded, and was forgiven; and by-and-by Suzette was induced to consent to an earlier date for her marriage. It was to be in the second week of December—five months after Geoffrey's return, and the honeymoon was to be spent upon that lovely shore where there is no winter; and then, early in the year, Suzette and her husband were to establish themselves at Discombe; and the doors of the Manor House were to be opened as they had never been opened since old Squire Wornock was a young man. Matcham was in good spirits at the prospect of pleasant hospitalities, a going and coming of nice people from London. Nobody in the immediate neighbourhood could afford to entertain upon a scale which would be a matter of course for Geoffrey Wornock.

"December will be here before we know where we are," said Mrs. Mornington, and her

constitutional delight in action and bustle of all kinds again found a safety-valve in the preparation of Suzette's trousseau.

Again she was confronted by a chilling indifference in the young lady for whom the clothes were being made. She advised Suzette to spend a week in London, in order to get her frocks and jackets from the best people. Salisbury would have been good enough for Allan, and Beechhurst; but for Squire Wornock's wife—for the Riviera—and for Discombe Manor, the most fashionable London artists should be called upon for their best achievements.

"I suppose you'll want to look well when you show yourself at Cannes as Mrs. Wornock? You won't want to be another awful example of an Englishwomen wearing out her old clothes on the Continent," said Mrs. Mornington snappishly.

As the General was also in favour of a week in town, Suzette consented, and bored herself to death in the family circle of an aunt who

was almost a stranger, but who had been offering her hospitality ever since she could remember. At this lady's house in Bryanstone Square, she spent a weary week of shopping, and trying on, always under the commanding eye of Aunt Mornington, who delighted in tramping about London out of the season, a London in which one could do just what one liked, without fear or favour of society.

And so the trousseau was put in hand; the wedding-gown chosen; the wedding-cake ordered; Mrs. Mornington taking all trouble off her brother's hands in the matter of the reception that was to be held after the wedding. Everybody was to be asked, of course; but the invitations were not to go out till a fortnight before the day.

"I don't want people to suppose I am giving them plenty of time to think about wedding-presents," Suzette explained, when she insisted upon this short notice.

All these arrangements were made in October—the marriage settlement was drafted, and

everybody was satisfied, since Geoffrey's liberality had required the curb rather than the spur.

For the rest of the year the lovers had nothing to think of but each other, and those great spirits of the past whose voices still spoke to them, whose genius was the companion of their lives. Beethoven, Mozart, Mendelssohn, Chopin, Schubert, were the friends of those quiet days; and love found its most eloquent interpreters in the language of the dead.

Sometimes, with a dim foreboding of evil, Suzette found herself wondering what she would do with that fiery restless spirit, were it not for that soothing influence of music; but she could not imagine Geoffrey dissociated from that second voice which seemed more characteristic of him than any spoken language—that voice of passionate joys and passionate regrets, of deepest melancholy, and of wildest mirth. Music made a third in their lives—the strongest link between them, holding them aloof from that outside world to which the

mysteries of harmony were unknown. Matcham society shrugged shoulders of wonder, not unmixed with disdain, when it was told how Miss Vincent practised five hours a day at home or at Discombe, and how she was beginning to play as well as a professional pianist. There had been a little dinner at the Manor House, and Geoffrey and his betrothed had played a duet which they called a Salterello, and Mrs. Mornington was complimented on her niece's gifts. Her execution was really surprising! No other young lady in Matcham could play like that. The girls of the present day lived too much out-of-doors to aspire to "execution." If they could play some little thing of Schumann's or the easiest of Chopin's or Rubinstein's waltzes, they were satisfied with themselves.

The hunting season began, but Geoffrey only hunted occasionally. He went only when General Vincent and his daughter went, not otherwise. Suzette had three or four hunters at her disposal now, and could have ridden to hounds three times a week had she so desired.

Geoffrey's first care had been to get some of his best horses ready for carrying a lady ; and she had her own thoroughbred, clever and kind, and able to carry her for a long day's work. But Suzette was not rabid about riding to hounds in all weathers, and at all distances. She liked a day now and then when her father was inclined to take her ; but she had no idea of giving up her whole life—books, music, cottage visiting, home, for fox-hunting. Geoffrey gave up many a day's sport in order to spend the wintry hours in the music-room at Discombe, or in long rambles in the woods, or over the downs, with his betrothed.

Was he happy, having won his heart's desire ? Suzette sometimes found herself asking that question, of herself, not of him. He was a creature of moods : sometimes animated, eloquent, hopeful, talking of life as if doubt, sorrow, satiety were unknown to him, undreamt of by him ; at other times strangely depressed, silent and gloomy, a dismal companion for a joyous high-spirited girl. Those

moods of his scared Suzette ; but she was prepared to put up with them. She had chosen him, or allowed herself to be chosen by him. She had bound herself to life-companionship with that fitful spirit. For him she had forsaken a lover whose happier nature need never have caused her an hour's anxiety—a man whose thoughts and feelings were easy to read and understand. She had taken the lover whose caprices and moods had awakened a romantic interest, had aroused first curiosity, then sympathy and regard. It was because he was a genius she loved him ; and she must resign herself to the capricious varieties of temperament which make genius difficult to deal with in everyday life.

No news of Allan reached Matcham till the beginning of November, when Mrs. Mornington took upon herself to write to Lady Emily about him, and received a very cold reply.

“I heard from my son last week,” Lady Emily wrote, after a stately acknowledgment of Mrs. Mornington's inquiry. “He has been laid up

with fever, but is better, and on his way home. He wrote from Brazzaville. It is something to know that he did not die in the desert, neglected and alone. Even on the eve of her marriage, your niece may be glad to hear that my son has survived her unkindness, and Mr. Wornock's desertion ; and that I am hoping to welcome him home before long."

Mrs. Mornington showed the letter to Suzette, whose mind was greatly relieved by this news of Allan.

"It is such a comfort to know that he is safe," she told Geoffrey, after commenting upon the unkindness of Lady Emily's letter.

The news which was so cheering to her had a contrary effect upon her lover. There was a look of trouble in Geoffrey's face when he was told of Allan's expected arrival, and he took no pains to conceal his displeasure.

"I am sorry you have suffered such intense anxiety," he said resentfully. "Did you suspect me of having murdered him ?"

"Nonsense, Geoffrey ! I could not help

thinking of all possible dangers ; and it distressed me to know that other people thought you unkind in leaving him."

"Other people have talked like fools—as foolishly as his mother, in whom one forgives folly. I was not his nurse, or his doctor, or his hired servant. I was only a casual companion ; and I was free to leave him how and when I pleased."

"But not to leave him in distress or difficulty. I knew you could not have done that. I knew that you could not act ungenerously. I think Lady Emily ought to make you a very humble apology for her rudeness, when she has her son safe at home."

"She may keep her apologies for people who value her opinion. I shall be a thousand miles away when her son returns."

He was silent and gloomy for the rest of the morning, and Suzette felt that she had offended him. Was he so jealous of her former lover that even the mention of his name—a natural interest in his safety—could awaken angry

feelings, and make a distance between them? Even their music went badly, and Mrs. Wornock, from her seat by the fire, reproached them for careless playing.

“That sonata of Porpora’s went ever so much better last week,” she said, on which Geoffrey threw down his bow in disgust.

“I dare say you are right. I am not in the mood for music. Will you come for a ride after lunch, Suzette? I can drive you home, and the horses can follow while you are getting on your habit. We might fall in with the hounds.”

Suzette declined this handsome offer. She was not going to say to lunch.

“Father complains that I am never at home,” she said, putting away the music.

“Your father is out with the hounds. What is the use of your going back to an empty house?”

“I would rather be at home to-day Geoffrey.”

“To think about Allan, and offer a thanksgiving for his safety?”

“I am full of thankfulness, and I am not ashamed of being glad.”

She went over to Mrs. Wornock, who had been too much absorbed in her book to be aware that the lovers were quarrelling, till Suzette’s brief good-bye and rapid departure startled her out of her tranquillity.

“Aren’t you going to walk home with her, Geoffrey?” she asked when her son returned to the music-room, after escorting his sweetheart no further than the hall-door.

“No,” he answered curtly; “we have had enough of each other for to-day.”

He went to the library, where the morning papers were lying unread, and turned to the second page of the *Times* for the list of steamers, and then to the shipping intelligence.

Zanzibar? Yes, the Messageries Maritimes steamer *Djemnah*, was reported as arriving at Marseilles yesterday morning. Allan was in England, perhaps. If all went well with him, he would come by the first ship after the mail that brought his letter. The *Rapide* would

bring him from Marseilles in time for the morning mail from Paris. He was in England—he whom Geoffrey had cruelly, treacherously deserted, helpless, and alone.

“All is fair in love,” Geoffrey told himself; “but I wonder what Suzette will think of her future husband when she knows all? Her future husband! If I were but her actual husband, I could defy Fate. Who knows? something may have happened to hinder his return—a fit of fever, a difficulty on the road. Three more weeks, and he may come back safe and sound; it won’t matter to me; I have no murderous thoughts about him. He may tell her the worst he can about me. Once my wife, I can hold and keep her in spite of the world. I will teach her that the man who sins for love’s sake must be forgiven for the sake of his love.”

He was consumed with a fever of anxiety which would not let him rest within four walls. He walked to Beechhurst, and unearthed a caretaker, who came strolling from the distant

stables, where he had been enlivening his idleness by gossip with the grooms. The blinds and shutters were all closed. Nothing had been heard from Mr. Carew.

“If he were in England you would have heard from him, I suppose?” said Geoffrey.

“Yes, sir; he would have wired, no doubt. My wife is housekeeper, and she would have had notice to get the house ready.”

“Even if Mr. Carew had gone to Suffolk, in the first instance?”

“I should think so, sir. He would know we should want time to prepare for him.”

There was relief in this. Perhaps the *Djemnah* had carried no such passenger as the man whose return Geoffrey Wornock dreaded.

He went back to the Manor in the gloom of a November evening. The darkness and loneliness of the road suited his humour. He wanted to be alone, to think out the situation, to walk down the devil within him.

Matcham Church clock was chiming the third quarter after five when he opened the gate and

went into Discombe Wood; but when the Discombe dressing-bell rang at half-past seven—an old-fashioned bell in a cupola, which gave needless information to every cottager within half a mile of the Manor House—Geoffrey had not come in.

His valet waited about for him till nearly dinner-time, and then went down to the drawing-room to ask Mrs. Wornock if his master was to dine at home.

“He is not in his dressing-room, ma’am. Will you wait dinner for him?”

“Yes, yes, of course I shall wait. Tell them to keep the dinner back.

The dinner was kept back so long that nobody eat any of it, out of the servants’ hall. Mrs. Wornock spent a troubled evening in the music-room, full of harassing fears; while grooms rode here and there—to Marsh House, to inquire if Mr. Wornock was dining there; to Matcham Road Station, to ask if he had left by any train, up or down the line; to the Vicarage, a most unlikely place, and to other

houses where it was just possible, but most improbable, that he should allow himself to be detained; but nowhere within the narrow circle of Matcham life was Mr. Wornock to be heard of.

“Pray don’t be anxious about Geoffrey,” Suzette wrote, in answer to Mrs. Wornock’s hastily scribbled note of inquiry; “you know how erratic he is. He was vexed at something I said about Allan this morning, and he has gone off somewhere in a huff. Keep up your spirits, chère mère. I will be with you early to-morrow morning. *I* am not frightened.”

“She is not frightened! If she loved him as I do, she would be as anxious as I am,” commented Mrs. Wornock, when she had read Suzette’s letter.

CHAPTER XII.

“IT IS THE STARS.”

MORNING brought no relief of mind to Mrs. Wornock, since it brought no news of her son; but before night there was even greater anxiety at Beechhurst, where Allan Carew's mother arrived late in the evening, summoned by a letter from her son, despatched from Southampton on the previous day, announcing his arrival, and asking her to join him at Beechhurst.

“I would go straight to Suffolk,” he wrote, “knowing how anxious my dear, tender-hearted mother will be to welcome her wanderer home, only—only I think you know that there is some one at Matcham about whose feelings I have still a shadow of doubt, still a lingering hope.

I go there first, where perhaps I may meet you ; and if I find that faint hope to be only a delusion, I know you will sympathize with my final disappointment.

“I have passed through many adventures and some dangers since I left the great lake. I have been ill, and I have been lonely ; but I come back to England the same man who went away—unchanged in heart and mind. However altered you may find the outer man, the inner man is the same.”

Having telegraphed from Waterloo to announce her arrival at Matcham Road Station, Lady Emily was bitterly disappointed at not finding her son waiting for her on the platform. She looked eagerly out into the November darkness, searching for the well-known figure among the few people standing here and there along the narrow platform. There was no Allan, and there was no Beechhurst carriage waiting for her.

The station-master recognized her as she alighted, and came to assist in the selection

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of her luggage, while a porter ran off to order a fly from the inn outside.

"Mr. Carew was expected home yesterday. Did he come?" asked Lady Emily, with that faint sickness of despair which follows on such a disappointment.

She had pictured the moment of reunion over and over again during the journey—had fancied how he would look, what he would say to her, and the delight of their long confidential talk on the drive home, and the pleasure of their *tête-à-tête* dinner. The only shadow upon her happy thought of him was her knowledge of what his faithful heart must needs suffer when he found that Suzette had engaged herself to his rival.

The station-master informed Lady Emily that Mr. Carew had arrived the day before, by this very train. He had evidently sent no notice of his arrival, as there was no carriage to meet him. He had very little luggage with him—only a portmanteau and a bale of rugs and sticks, which had been sent to Beechhurst

by the station 'bus. Mr. Carew had walked home.

He was at home, then. The gladness of reunion was only delayed for an hour. His mother tried to make light of her disappointment and of his neglect. He had given an order to the stable, perhaps, and it had been forgotten. There was a mistake somewhere, but no unkindness on his part.

“Was my son looking in pretty good health?” she asked the station-master.

“Yes, my lady, allowing for the wear and tear of a sea-voyage, Mr. Carew looked pretty well; but he looked pulled down a bit since he went away. You mustn't be surprised at a little change in that way.”

“Yes, yes, no doubt he is altered. Years of travel and fatigue and danger. Ah, there is the fly; they have been very quick. Come, Taylor,” to the middle-aged, homely Suffolk abigail who stood on guard over her mistress's luggage.

The drive through the November night seemed

longer to the lady inside the carriage, sitting alone and longing for the sight of her son's face, than to her maid on the box beside John coachman, of the Station Inn, chatting sociably about the improvements in the neighbourhood and the prospects of the hunting season. And, oh, bitter agony of disappointment when the door of Beechhurst was opened, and Lady Emily saw only a half-lit hall and staircase, and the stolid countenance of butler and caretaker, whose informal attire too plainly showed her that his master was not in the house.

"Has Mr. Carew gone away again?" she asked, as the man helped her out of the carriage, thinking vaguely that Allan might have started off for Suffolk that morning, and that she and he were travelling to and fro at cross purposes.

"Mr. Carew has not been home, my lady."

"Not been home? Why, he arrived yesterday by the train I came by to-night. The station-master told me so."

"Then he must be visiting somewhere in the neighbourhood, my lady. Some luggage was

brought at nine o'clock ; but my master has not been home."

She stood looking at the man dumbly, paralyzed by apprehension. Where could Allan be? what could he have done with himself? His letter had asked her to meet him in that house. He had arrived at the station twenty-four hours before he could expect her; he had sent home his luggage, and had walked out of the station in the most casual manner, saying that he was going home. Was it credible that he would go to anybody else's house, straight from the station, luggageless, newly landed after a long sea-voyage? No man in his senses would so act. Yet there was but one course for an anxious mother to take, and Lady Emily returned to the fly, and ordered the man to drive to Marsh House.

Allan might have gone straight to Suzette. Who could tell what effect the news of her approaching marriage might have upon his mind? His letter told his mother that he still hoped; and the change from hope to despair

would be crushing. He might have hurried away from the scene of his disappointment, careless how or where he went, so long as he got himself far away from the place associated with his fickle sweetheart.

Suzette was at home, and received Lady Emily kindly, forgetting all that had gone before in her compassion for the mother's distress.

Allan had called at Marsh House on the previous evening during Suzette's absence. He had been told that she was at the Manor, and the servant had understood him to say that he was going on to the Manor. He had seemed put out at hearing where she was, the soldier servant had told his young mistress.

"And were you not at the Manor when he called?" Lady Emily asked.

"No; I left before lunch; but instead of coming home, where I was not expected, I spent the afternoon at the Vicarage and on the golf-ground with Bessie Edgefield."

"And Mr. Wornock was with you most of the time, I suppose?"

“Not any of the time.”

“Is he away, then?”

“No. If you must know the truth, we had—well, I can hardly say, we had quarrelled; but Geoffrey had been very disagreeable, and I was glad to leave him to himself for the afternoon.”

“You are good friends again now, no doubt?”

“We have not seen each other since. Geoffrey has gone away, without letting any one know where he was going, and his poor mother is anxious and unhappy about him. He is so impetuous—so erratic.”

“And you, his sweetheart, are still more anxious, no doubt?”

“I am anxious chiefly for his poor mother’s sake. She is too easily frightened.”

“Can they have gone away together, anywhere?” said Lady Emily.

“Together—Allan and Geoffrey!” exclaimed Suzette. “No, I don’t think they would do that.”

“Why not? They were together for two years in Africa.”

“Yes, but that was different. I don’t think, in Geoffrey’s state of mind, that he would have gone on a journey with your son. He has a jealous temper, I am sorry to say, and he was irritable and unreasonable yesterday when he heard of—Mr. Carew’s return. Is it likely that he would have gone off on any expedition with your son to London or anywhere else?”

“Then where is my son? He was here at this hour yesterday. He left here to go to the Manor; and now you tell me that Mr. Wornock is missing, and that my son has not been heard of since he left your door.”

“He has not been at the Manor. Mrs. Wornock would have told me if he had called. I was with her all this morning. She is wretched about Geoffrey. They are both safe, I dare say; but their disappearance is very alarming.”

“Alarming, yes. It means something dreadful—something I dare not think of—unless, indeed, Allan changed his mind on finding the state of things here, and went off to Suffolk,

intending to anticipate my journey. Oh, I dare say I am frightening myself for nothing. Will you let me write a telegram?" looking distractedly round the room for pens and ink.

"Dear Lady Emily, pray don't be too anxious. One is so often frightened for nothing. My father has only to be an hour later than usual on a hunting day in order to make me half distracted. Please sit down by the fire, here in this comfortable chair. I'll write your telegram, and send it off instantly."

She rang the bell, and then seated herself quietly at her writing-table, while Allan's mother sank into a chair, the image of helplessness.

"What shall I say?"

"To Allan Carew, Fendyke, Millfield, Suffolk.

"I am miserable at not finding you here. Reply immediately, with full information as to your plans.

"EMILY CAREW."

"God grant I may hear of him there," said Lady Emily, when she had read message and address with a searching eye, lest Suzette's writing should offer any excuse for mistakes. The telegram was handed to the servant with instructions to take it himself to the post-office; and then Lady Emily kissed Suzette with a sad remorseful kiss, and went back to the fly.

"Discombe Manor," she told the man, with very little consideration for the hard-working fly-horse.

"Yes, my lady; it'll be about as much as he can do."

"He? What do you mean?"

"The horse, my lady. He's been on his legs two hours a'ready, and the Manor's a good three mile; but I suppose I shall be able to wash out his mouth there before I takes him home?"

"Yes, yes; you may do what you like; only get me to the Manor as fast as you can."

Allan had not been seen at the Manor. No one had rung the hall-door bell yesterday after luncheon. Mrs. Wornock's monastic solitude was not often intruded upon by visitors; and yesterday there had been no one. The door had not been opened after Miss Vincent went out, Geoffrey Wornock's impatient temper always choosing an easier mode of egress than that ponderous hall door, which required a servant's attendance, or else closed with a bang that reverberated through the house. Whatever Allan's intention might have been when he left Marsh House, he had not come to Discombe.

Lady Emily and Mrs. Wornock were softened in their feelings for each other by a mutual terror; but Allan's mother dwelt upon the fact that the two young men, as travellers of old, might have started off upon some expedition; a run up to London to see some new production at the theatre; a billiard match; anything in which young men might be interested.

"They must be much better friends than before they went to Africa—much closer companions," urged Lady Emily. "I feel there is less reason for fear now that I know your son is missing as well as Allan."

Mrs. Wornock tried to take the same hopeful view; but she was of a less hopeful temperament, and she knew too much of Geoffrey's jealous distrust of his rival to believe that there had been any companionable feeling between the two young men since Allan's return.

"Oh, I am afraid, I am afraid!" she moaned piteously, wringing her hands in an agony of apprehension.

"What is it you fear? What calamity can have happened which would involve both your son and mine? Surely nothing dreadful could happen to both our sons, and yet no tidings come either to you or to me. Wherever they were—if any accident happened—one or other of them would be recognized. Some one would bring us the news. No; I have been

anxious and unhappy ; but I am sure now that I have been needlessly anxious. We shall hear from them—very soon.”

Mrs. Wornock clasped Lady Emily’s hand in silence, and shook her head despondently.

“What is it you fear ?” asked Allan’s mother.

“I don’t know—but I am full of fear for Geoffrey—for both of them.”

Lady Emily left her, depressed and dispirited by the fear which shrunk from shaping itself in words. The disposition to take a hopeful view of the case did not last in the face of Mrs. Wornock’s mysterious agitations, and Allan’s mother went back to Beechhurst stupefied with anxiety, able only to walk about the house, in and out of the empty rooms, in helpless misery.

That state of not knowing what to fear ended suddenly soon after nine o’clock, when there came the sound of wheels, and a carriage stopped at the hall door. Lady Emily rushed to the door and opened it with her own hands, before any one had time to ring the bell ; opened it to

find herself face to face with the woman she had left only two hours before.

Mrs. Wornock was stepping out of her carriage as the hall door opened. She wore neither bonnet nor cloak, only a shawl wrapped round her head and shoulders.

“He is found!” she said, agitatedly. “Will you come with me?”

“Your son?”

“No; Allan Carew. Ah, it is dreadful to think of, dreadful to tell you. I came myself; I wouldn’t let any one else——”

“He is dead!” cried Lady Emily, her heart feeling like ice, her knees trembling under her.

“No, no! Dreadfully hurt—but not dead. There is hope still—Mr. Podmore does not give up hope. I have sent a messenger to Salisbury. We shall have Dr. Etheridge to-morrow morning—or I will send to London——”

“Where is my son—my murdered—dying son?”

“No, no, no—not dying—not murdered. Don’t I tell you there is hope? He is at

Discombe—they have put him in Geoffrey's room. Everything is being done. He may recover—he will, he must recover.”

Lady Emily was seated in the brougham, unconscious of the movements that had conveyed her there; the butler was at the hall door by this time, staring in blank wonder, not knowing what to think of this rapid departure.

“Send your mistress's maid to the Manor with her things,” ordered Mrs. Wornock, hurriedly. And then to her own servant, waiting at the carriage door, “Home—as fast as he can drive.”

“Why was he taken to your house, and not to his own?” asked Lady Emily, in a dull whisper, when the carriage had driven out of the gates.

“Because it was so much nearer to bring him. He was found in our woods—robbed—and hurt, cruelly hurt. There is a dreadful wound upon his head, and there are signs of a desperate struggle—as if he had fought for his life——”

“Oh, God, that he should be murdered—here in England—within an hour’s walk of his own house! And I have dreamt of him in some dreadful danger—from savage beasts, savage men—night after night, in those dreary years he was away—and that he should come home—home—to love, and happiness, and safety, as I thought—to meet the fate I had been fearing! I prayed God day and night for him—prayed that he might be brought back to me in safety. And he came back—came back only to die,” wailed the unhappy woman, her head sunk upon her knees, her hands working convulsively amongst her loosened hair.

“He will *not* die,” cried Mrs. Wornock, fiercely. “Don’t I tell you that he will not die? The wound need not be fatal; the doctor said it was not a hopeless case. Why do you go on raving—as if you wanted him to die—as if you were bent on being miserable—and driving me mad?”

“You! What have you to do with it? He is not your son. Your son is safe enough, I

dare say. Your son—who left him in the desert—who came home to steal his comrade's sweetheart. Your son is safe. Such a man as that is never in danger."

Mrs. Wornock bore this insulting speech in silence; and there was no word more on either side for the rest of the journey.

Not without hope! Looking down at the motionless form lying on Geoffrey Wornock's bed, in the large airy room, the hand on the coverlet as white as the lawn sheet, the face disfigured and hardly to be recognized as Allan's face under the broad linen bandage which covered forehead and eyes, the lips livid and speechless—looking with agonized heart at this spectacle, Allan's mother found it hard to believe the doctor's assurance that the case was not, in his humble opinion, utterly hopeless.

"We shall know more to-morrow," he said.

"Are they trying to find the wretch who did it?" asked Lady Emily. "God grant he may be hanged for murder, if my son is to die."

“I shall go from here to the police-station, and take all necessary steps, if I have your ladyship’s authority for doing so. The keeper who found your poor son sent a lad off to give information.”

“Yes, yes. And you will offer a reward—a large reward. My poor boy—my dear, dear son—to see him lying there—quite unconscious—speechless—helpless. My murdered boy! Where did they find him—how——”

“Lying in a little hollow among the under-wood, within a few paces of the path. There is a gate in the fence opening into the high-road, and a footpath, and cart-track, which cut into the main drive four or five hundred yards from the gate. It is a point at which he might be likely to meet a tramp—as it is so near the road—and a long way from any of the lodge gates. The drive would be in Mr. Carew’s straight course from Marsh House here.”

“Yes, yes! And it was a tramp—you are sure of that—a common robber—who attacked him?”

“Evidently. His pockets were turned inside out—his watch was gone.”

“There was a day when no one man would have dared to attack my son.”

“There may have been two men. The ground was a good deal trampled, the keeper told me; but they would be able to see very little by the light of a couple of lanterns brought from the stables to the north lodge. We shall see the footsteps, and be able to come to a better idea of the struggle, to-morrow morning.”

“Send for a London detective—the best that can be got,” Lady Emily interrupted eagerly.

“Be sure we will do all that can be done.”

“He has no father to take his part,” she went on, distractedly; “no wife—no sweetheart even—to care for him—only a poor, weak mother. If he should die, there will be only one broken heart in the world—only one——”

“Dear lady, why anticipate the worst?” remonstrated the doctor.

“Yes, yes, I am wrong. I must cast myself

upon God's mercy. I am not an irreligious woman. I will pray for my son. There is nothing else in the world that I can do. But while I am praying you will work—you will find the wretch who did this cruel deed. You will send for the cleverest doctor in London—the one man of all men who can cure my poor boy.”

“You may trust me, Lady Emily. Nothing shall be forgotten or deferred.”

It was not till the following morning that the news of Allan Carew's condition, and his presence at Discombe, reached General Vincent and his daughter. Mrs. Mornington was the bearer of those dismal tidings. Always active, alert, and early afoot, she heard of the tragedy from the village tradesmen, and was told three conflicting versions of the story—first at the grocer's, where she was assured that Mr. Carew had breathed his last five minutes after he was carried into the Manor House; next from the butcher's wife, a very ladylike person, rarely

seen except through glass, in a little counting-house, giving on to the shop—and who opened her glass shutter on purpose to inform Mrs. Mornington that both young gentlemen had been picked up for dead in the copse at Discombe; Mr. Wornock shot through the heart, Mr. Carew with a bullet in his left temple, the result of a duel to the death. A third informant, taking the air in front of the coachbuilder's workshop—where everybody's carriages went sooner or later for repairs—assured Mrs. Mornington that there hadn't been much harm done, and that Mr. Carew, who had had his pockets picked by a tramp, had been more frightened than hurt.

Mrs. Mornington was not the kind of person to languish in uncertainty about any fact in local history while she possessed the nerves of speech and locomotion. Before the coachbuilder finished his rambling story, she had despatched a village boy to the Grove to order her pony-cart to be brought her as quickly as the groom could get it ready; and her orders

being always respected, the honest bay cob met her, rattling his bit and whisking his tail from joyous freshness, at the bend of the village street, within a quarter of an hour of the messenger's start. The boy had run his fastest; the groom had not lost a moment; for Mrs. Mornington was one of those excellent mistresses who stand no nonsense from their servants.

The cob went to Discombe at a fast trot, and returned stablewards still faster, indulging in occasional spurts of cantering, which his mistress did not check with her usual severity.

She saw no one but servants at the Manor House. Mrs. Wornock was in her own room, quite prostrate, the butler explained; Lady Emily was with Mr. Carew, who had passed a bad night, and was certainly no better this morning, even if he were no worse.

"Is it very serious, Davidson?" Mrs. Mornington asked the trustworthy old servant.

"I'm afraid it couldn't be much worse, ma'am. The doctor from Salisbury was here at nine o'clock, and was upstairs with Mr.

Podmore very near an hour; but he didn't look very cheerful when he left—no more did Mr. Podmore. And there's another doctor been telegraphed for from London. If doctors can save the poor gentleman's life, he'll be spared. But I saw his face last night when he was carried upstairs, and I can't say *I've* much hopes of him."

"Never mind your hopes, Davidson, if the doctors can pull him through. A young man can get over a good deal."

"If he can get over having his head mashed—and lying for twenty-seven hours in a wood—he must have a better constitootion than ever I heard tell of."

"The wretch who attacked him has not been found yet, I suppose?"

"No, ma'am, not yet, nor never likely to be, so far as I can see. He had seven and twenty hours' start, you see, ma'am; and if a professional thief couldn't get off with that much law, the profession can't be up to much; begging your pardon, ma'am, for venturing

to express an opinion,” concluded Davidson, who felt that he had been presuming on an old servant’s licence.

Mrs. Mornington told him she was very glad to hear his opinion, and then handed him cards for the two ladies, on each of which she had scribbled assurances of sympathy; and with this much information from the fountain-head, she appeared in the drawing-room at Marsh House, where she found Suzette sitting by the fire in a very despondent mood. Her lover’s mysterious disappearance after something which was very like a quarrel, was not a cheering incident in her life; and now Lady Emily’s anxiety about her son—the fact that he, too, should be missing—increased her trouble of mind.

She listened aghast to her aunt’s story.

“What does it mean?” she faltered. “What can it mean?”

“The meaning is plain enough, I think. This poor young man was waylaid in the dusk on Thursday evening—attacked and plundered.”

“By a tramp?”

“By one of the criminal classes—a ticket-of-leave man, perhaps, rambling from Portland to London, ready to snatch any opportunity on the way. There’s very little use in speculating about a wretch of that class. There are plenty of such ruffians loose in the world, I dare say.”

“But it would have served a robber’s purpose just as well to have only stunned him.”

“Oh, those gentry don’t consider things so nicely. No doubt Allan showed fight. And the ruffian would have no mercy.”

“Do you think he will die? Oh, aunt, how terrible if he were to die. And Geoffrey still away—Mrs. Wornock miserable about him!”

“Yes, that’s the strangest part of the business! What can have induced Geoffrey to take himself off in that mysterious way? Have you any idea why he went?”

“No. I have no idea.”

“If he is keeping away of his own accord—if

nothing dreadful has happened to him—his conduct is most insulting to you.”

“Never mind me, aunt; while there is this trouble at Discombe—for poor Lady Emily.”

“I am very sorry for her; but I am obliged to think of you. His behaviour places you in such an awkward position—a ridiculous position. Your wedding-day fixed—hurried on with red-hot impatience by this young man—and he, the bridegroom, missing! What do you suppose people will say?”

“I have no suppositions about people outside our lives. I can only think of the sorrow at Discombe. People can say anything they like,” Suzette answered wearily.

Her father had been questioning her, and had talked very much in the same strain as her aunt. She was tired to heart-sickness of talk about Geoffrey. All had grown dark in her life; and darkest of all was her thought of her betrothed.

There had been that in his manner when she parted with him which had filled her with a

shapeless dread, a terror not to be lightly named, a terror she had not ventured to suggest even to her father. And here was her aunt teasing her about other people—utterly indifferent people—and their ideas.

“What will people *not* say?” exclaimed Mrs. Mornington, after a troubled pause, in which she had poked the fire almost savagely, and pulled a chairback straight. “I must have a serious talk with your father. Is he at home?”

“No. He is out shooting.”

“Shooting? It is scarcely decent of him in the present state of affairs. Any more presents?”

“I don’t know. Yes; there was a box came this morning. I haven’t opened it. Please don’t talk of presents. It is too horrid to think of them.”

“Horridly embarrassing,” said Mrs. Mornington. “You had better come to the Grove, Suzette. There’s no good in your moping alone here. And you may have visitors in the afternoon prying and questioning.”

“Thanks, aunt, I would rather be at home. I shall deny myself to everybody except Bessie Edgefield.”

“Ah, and you’ll tell her everything, and she will tell everybody in Matcham.”

“I have nothing to tell—nothing that Bessie cannot find out from other people. But she is not a gossip; and she is always *simpatica*.”

CHAPTER XIII.

MADNESS OR CRIME ?

DAYS grew into weeks, and the slow, anxious hours brought very little change in Allan's condition, and certainly no change which the doctors could call a substantial improvement. Physician and surgeon from London, famous specialists both, came at weekly intervals and testified to the good fight which the patient was making, and the latent power of a frame which had been strained and wasted by the hardships of African travel, and which was now called upon to recover from severe injuries. Consciousness had returned, but not reason. The young man had not once recognized the mother who rarely left his bedside, but whose bland and pleasant countenance was so sorely altered by

grief and anxiety that even in the full possession of his senses he might hardly have known her. The power of speech had returned, but only in delirious utterances, or in a strange gibberish, which poor Lady Emily mistook for an African language, but which was really the nonsense-tongue of a disordered brain.

The doctors pronounced the case not utterly without hope ; but they would commit themselves to nothing further than this. It was a wonder to have kept him alive so long. His recovery would be almost a miracle.

Two trained nurses from the county hospital alternated the daily and nightly watch by the sick-bed, and Lady Emily shared the day's, and sometimes the night's, duty, humbly assisting the skilled attendants, grateful for being permitted to aid in the smallest service for the son who lay helpless, inert, and unobserving on that bed which even yet might be his bed of death.

No one but those three women and the doctors was allowed to enter Allan's room. Mrs. Wor-nock was very kind and sympathetic, in spite of

torturing anxieties about her son's unexplained absence; but she expressed no desire to see Allan, and she seldom saw Lady Emily for more than a few minutes in the course of the day. The whole house was ordered with reference to the sick-room. Organ and piano were closed and dumb, and a funereal silence reigned everywhere.

And so the wintry days went by, and rain and rough weather made a sufficient excuse for Suzette's staying quietly at home, and seeing very little of the outer world. Mrs. Mornington took the social aspect of the crisis entirely on her own hands, and informed her friends that the wedding had been deferred, partly on account of Allan's illness, and for other reasons which she was not at liberty to explain.

"My niece is very capricious," she said.

"I hope she has not sent Mr. Wornock off to Africa again!" exclaimed Mrs. Roebuck. "Such a brilliant young man, with a house so peculiarly adapted for entertaining, should not be allowed to become an absentee. It is too great a loss

for such a place as this, where so few people entertain.”

Mrs. Roebuck’s estimate of her acquaintance was always based upon their capacity for entertaining, though she herself, on this scale, would have been marked zero.

“No, I don’t think he will go back to Africa. But my niece and he have agreed to part—for a short time, at any rate. She is sending back all her wedding-presents this week.”

“Oh, pray don’t let her send me that absurd Japanese paper-knife ! I only chose it because it is so deliciously ugly and queer. And I knew that, marrying a man of Mr. Wornock’s means, she wouldn’t want anything costly or useful—no fish-knives or salt-cellars.”

“Well, if it really is off, or likely to be off,” Mr. Roebuck said, with a solemnly confidential air, “I don’t mind saying in confidence that I think your niece has acted wisely. The young man is a genius, no doubt ; but he’s a little bit overstrung—*fanatico per la musica*, don’t you know. And one never knows whether that sort

of thing won't go further," tapping his forehead suggestively.

"Oh, *das macht nichts*; the poor dear young man is *toqué*, only *toqué*, not *fêlé*," protested Mrs. Roebuck, who affected a polyglot style.

"Ah, but the mother, don't you know! That's where the danger comes in. The mother has never been quite right," argued her husband.

"I am not going to accept congratulations," said Mrs. Mornington. "I'm very sorry the marriage has been postponed. Mr. Wornock and Suzette are admirably adapted for each other, and he is no more cracked than I am. And remember the marriage is put off—not broken off."

"All the more reason why she should not send me back that Japanese absurdity," said Mrs. Roebuck, as if the paper-knife were of as much consequence as the marriage.

Suzette saw Mrs. Wornock nearly every day during that time of trouble—sometimes at

Discombe, where they sat together in the music-room, or paced the wintry garden, saying very little to each other, but the elder woman taking comfort from the presence of the younger.

"I am miserable about him," she told Suzette; and that was all she would ever say of her son.

She had no suggestions to offer as to the cause of his disappearance. She uttered no complaint of his unkindness.

Suzette inquired if the police had made any discovery about Allan's assailant.

No, nothing; or, at least, Mrs. Wornock had heard of nothing.

"Lady Emily may know more than she cares to tell me," she said.

"Oh, I think not! Living in your house, indebted so deeply to your kindness, she could not be so churlish as to keep anything back."

"She thinks of nothing but her son. She would have no mercy upon any one who had injured him."

Her tone startled Suzette, with the recurrence

of a terror which she had tried to dismiss from her mind as groundless and irrational.

“No, no ; of course not. Who could expect her to have mercy ? However hard the law might be, she would never think the sentence hard enough. Her only son, her idolized son, brought to the brink of the grave, perhaps doomed to die, in spite of all that can be done for him.”

Suzette tried to shut out that horrible idea—the hideous fancy that the ruffian who had attacked Allan Carew was no casual offender, extemporizing a crime on the suggestion of the moment, for the chance contents of a gentleman’s purse, and an obvious watch and chain. Murder so brutal is not often the result of a chance encounter. Yet such things have been ; and the alternative of a private vengeance—a vindictive jealousy culminating in attempted murder—was too horrible. Yet that dreadful suspicion haunted Suzette’s pillow in the long winter nights—nights of wakefulness and sorrow.

Where was he, that miserable man, who had won her heart in spite of her better reason, and in loving whom she had seldom been without the sense of trouble and fear? His want of mental balance had been painfully obvious to her even in their happiest hours; and she had felt that there was peril in a nature so capricious and so intense. She had discovered that for him religion was no strong rock. He had laughed away every serious question, and had made her feel that, in all the most solemn thoughts of life and after-life, they were divided by an impassable gulf: on his side, all that is boldest and saddest in modern thought: on her side, the simple, unquestioning faith which she had accepted in the dawn of her reason, and which satisfied an intellect not given to speculate upon the Unknowable. She had found that, not only upon religious questions, but even on the moral code of this life, there were wide differences in their ideas. Dimly, and with growing apprehension, she had divined the element of

lawlessness in Geoffrey's character, revealed in his admiration of men for whom neither religion nor law had been a restraining influence—men for whom passion had been ever the guiding star. Lives that to her seemed only criminal were extolled by him as sublime. Such, or such a man, whose unbridled will had wrought ruin for himself and others, was lauded as one who had known the glory of life in its fullest meaning, who had verily lived, not crawled between earth and heaven.

In her own simple, unpretentious way, Suzette had tried to combat opinions which had shocked her; and then Geoffrey had laughed off her fears, and had promised that for her sake he would think as she thought, he would school himself to accept a spiritual guide of her choosing.

“Who shall my master be, Suzette? Shall I be broad and liberal with Stanley, severe with Manning, intense with Liddon, mystical with Newman? ‘Thou for my sake at Allah’s shrine, and I——’ You know the rest. I will do anything to make my dearest happy.”

“Anything except pretend, Geoffrey. You must never do that.”

“Mustn’t I? Then we had better leave religion out of the question; until, perhaps, it may grow up in my mind, suddenly, like Jonah’s gourd, out of my love for you.”

In all the weary time while Allan was lying at the gate of death, and Geoffrey had so strangely vanished, Suzette had never doubted the love of her betrothed. The possibility of change or fickleness on his part never entered into her mind. Of the truth and intensity of his affection she, who had been his betrothed for nearly half a year, could not doubt. Her fears and anxieties took a darker form than any fear of alienated feelings, or inconstancy. Suicide, crime, madness, were the things she feared, though she never expressed her fears. Her father heard no lamentations from those pale lips; but he could read the marks of distress in her countenance, and he was grieved and anxious for her sake.

He too invoked the powers of the detective

police, but quietly, and without anybody's knowledge. He went up to London, and put the case of Geoffrey's disappearance before one of the sagest philosophers who had ever adorned the detective force at Scotland Yard, now retired and practising delicate investigations on his own account.

“Do you suppose there has been a fatal accident, or that he has been keeping out of the way on purpose?” asked the General, after all particulars had been stated.

“An accident would have been heard of before now. No doubt he is keeping out of the way. Have you any reason to suppose him mentally afflicted?”

“Afflicted, no. Eccentric, perhaps, though I should hardly call him that—capricious, somewhat whimsical. Mentally afflicted? No, decidedly not.”

“Ah! That trick of keeping out of the way is a very common thing in madness. If he is not mad, there must be some strong reason for his disappearance. He must

have done something to put himself in jeopardy."

"Impossible! No, no, no. I can't entertain the idea for a moment," cried the General, thinking of that murderous attack in the wood.

"Do you wish us to make inquiries?"

"No, no, better not—the young man's mother is having everything done. I am not a relation—I only wanted the benefit of a professional opinion. I thought you might be able to throw some light——"

"No two cases are quite alike, sir; but I think you will find I am right here, and that in this case there is lunacy, or there has been a crime."

"Madness or crime," mused the General, as he left the office. "I can't go back to Suzette and tell her that. I must take her away again."

He announced his intention of starting for the Riviera next morning at the breakfast-table; but his daughter implored him piteously to let her stay at Matcham.

“It would be so heartless to go away while Allan is hovering between life and death, and while——”

She left the sentence unfinished. She could not trust herself to speak of Geoffrey.

CHAPTER XIV.

“HE HATH AWAKENED FROM THE DREAM OF LIFE.”

It was the day which was to have seen Suzette's wedding—the thirteenth of December, a dull, mild December, promising that green Christmas which is said to people churchyards with new-comers; a December to gladden the heart of the fox-hunter, and disappoint the skater.

Sitting in melancholy solitude by the drawing-room fire, on this grey, rainy morning, Suzette was glad to remember that she had prevented the sending out of invitation cards, and that very few people in Matcham knew the intended date of that wedding which was never to be. There were not many to think of her with especial pity on this particular day, sitting

alone in her desolation, in her dark serge frock, with the black poodle, Caro, and her piano for her only companions. Even the companionship of that beloved piano had failed her since Geoffrey's disappearance. Music was too closely associated with his presence. There was not a single composition in her portfolio that did not recall him—not an air she played that did not bring back the words he had spoken when last her fingers followed the caprices of the composer. He had been her master as well as her lover—he had taught her the subtleties of musical expression—had breathed mind into her music.

Bessie Edgefield knew the date; but Bessie was sympathetic, and never officious or obtrusive. She would drop in by-and-by, no doubt, pretending not to remember anything particular about the day. She would be full of some little bit of village news, or a new book from Mudie's, or Mrs. Roebuck's last bonnet.

The wedding was to have been at two o'clock, a sensible, comfortable hour; giving the bride

ample leisure in which to put on her wedding finery. The hours between breakfast and luncheon seemed longer than usual that morning, a long blank weariness, after Suzette had seen her father mount and ride away on his favourite hunter. The hounds met on the other side of the downs, on the borders of Hampshire. It would be late, most likely, before she would welcome that kind father to the comfortable fireside, and listen, or at least pretend to listen, to the varying fortunes of an adventurous day. And in the meantime she had the day all before her, to dispose of as best she might, that day which was to have seen her a bride.

Was she sorrowing for the lover who had forsaken her, as she sat looking with sad, tearless eyes into the fire. Was she regretting the happiness that might have been, thinking of a life which should have been cloudless? No, she had never contemplated a life of cloudless happiness with Geoffrey Wornock. She had loved that fiery spirit. Her love had been

conquered by a mind stronger than her own, and she had submitted, almost as a slave submits to her captor. Mentally she had been in bondage, able to see all that was faulty and perilous in the character of her conqueror, yet loving him in spite of his faults.

But to-day his image was associated with a great terror—a terror of undiscovered crime—the fear that when next she heard his name spoken she would hear of him as an arrested criminal; or as a suicide, self-slaughtered in some quiet spot, where the searchers must needs be slow to find him.

Two o'clock. She had tried all her best-loved books in the endeavour to forget the dark realities of life; but books did not help her to-day. She never went into the dining-room for a formal luncheon when her father was out for the day; preferring some light refreshment of the kind which one hears of in Miss Austen's novels as "the tray," a modest meal of cake and fruit, with nothing more substantial than a sandwich. To-day

even the sandwich was impossible. Her lips were dry with an inward fever. Her hands were cold as ice, her forehead was burning. “Was it raining?” she asked the servant. “No, the rain had ceased an hour ago,” the man told her. She started up with a feeling of relief at the idea of escape from the dull, silent house; put on her hat and jacket, and went out by the glass door into the garden, where the mild winter had left a few flowers, pale Dijon roses, amidst the thick foliage of honeysuckle and magnolia on the south wall, a lingering chrysanthemum here and there in a sheltered bend of the shrubbery. The air was full of the sweetness of herbs and flowers, and the freshness of the rain. Yes, it was a relief to be walking about, looking at the shrubs, shaking the rain from the feathery branches of the deodaras, searching for late violets behind a border of close-clipped box. It was a comfortable, old-fashioned garden, full of things that had been growing for the best part of a century, a garden of broad gravel

walks, and square grass plots, espaliers hiding asparagus-beds, the scent of sweet herbs conquering the more delicate odours of violets and rare roses—a dear old garden to be happy in, and a quiet retreat in which to walk alone with sorrow.

Suzette walked alone with her sorrow for nearly an hour, thankful for the hazard which had carried her energetic aunt to Salisbury two days before, on a visit to her friends in the Close, and had thus spared her Mrs. Mornington's society on this particular day. To have been comforted, or to have been bewailed over, would have added to her burden. To walk alone in this dull old garden was best.

Not alone any more! She heard the rustling of branches at the other end of the long green alley, and a footstep—a heavier footfall than Bessie Edgefield's—on the moist gravel. Her heart throbbed with a startled expectancy. Joy or fear? She had no time to know which feeling predominated before she saw her lover coming quickly towards her. He was dressed,

not as she had been accustomed to see him in the corduroy waistcoat, short tweed coat, and knickerbockers of rustic out-of-door life, but in a frock-coat, light grey trousers, and white waistcoat, and was wearing a tall hat. She had time to note these details, and the malmaison carnation in his coat, and the light gloves which he was carrying, before he was at her side, looking down at her with wild, bloodshot eyes, grasping her arm with a strong hand, while those smart lavender gloves dropped from his unconscious grasp, and fell on the wet gravel, to be trampled underfoot like weeds.

“Why were you not at the church? Why are you wearing that dingy frock? You and your bridesmaids ought to have been ready an hour ago. I have been waiting for you. Have you forgotten what this day means?”

“Geoffrey! have not *you* forgotten? What madness to come back like this! What have you been doing with your life since the fourteenth of November? Where have you been hiding?”

“Where? Hiding! Nonsense! I have been travelling. I took it into my head, when Allan was coming back, that you didn’t care for me, that he was the favoured lover, in spite of all. I had extorted your promise—and you were sorry you had ever given it. And I thought the best thing for me would be to make myself scarce, to go to Africa, Australia, anywhere. The world is big enough for two people to give each other a wide berth, but not big enough for Allan and me, if you liked him better than me. I was a fool, that’s all: a fool to doubt my dearest! But there’s no time to lose. We must be married before three. Come to the church as you are. What does it matter? I’ve put on my war-paint, you see. My valet seemed to think I was mad.”

“You have seen your mother?”

“Yes, she has been plaguing me with questions. I gave her the slip. Allan is there, in my house. The irony of fate, isn’t it? Hovering between life and death, my mother told me. How long will he hesitate between two opinions?”

I left them wondering, and hurried to the church to meet you, only to find emptiness. No one there! Not even the sexton. But there is still time. We can be married—you and I—with the sexton and pew-opener for witnesses, and can start for the other end of the world to-night.”

“Geoffrey, why did you go away?” she asked, looking up at that wild face with infinite terror in her own.

The restless eyes, the convulsive working of the dry hot lips told their story only too plainly, the story of a mind distraught.

“Dear Geoffrey!” she said gently, with unspeakable pity for this human wreck, “there can be no marriage to-day. We are all in great trouble—about Allan.”

“About Allan—always about Allan!” he interrupted savagely. “What has Allan to do with the matter? It is our wedding-day, yours and mine. I don’t want Allan for my best man.”

“There can be no marriage while Allan is ill, lying in your house, so nearly murdered;

perhaps even yet to die from that cruel usage. They are looking for his murderer, Geoffrey. Was it wise for you to come back to this place, knowing that?"

"Knowing what?"

"That Allan's mother is determined to find the man who so nearly killed her son."

"What have I to do with her determination? I shall neither hinder nor help her."

Oh, the crafty smile, the malice and the cunning in that face, a look which Suzette had never seen till now! A look which made that once splendid countenance seem the face of a stranger.

She shrank from him involuntarily. He saw the sudden look of repulsion, and tightened his grasp upon her arm, until she gave a cry of pain.

"Did I hurt you?" loosening his grasp with a laugh. "What a fluttering little dove it is; so easily scared, so easily hurt. Come, Suzette, you are not going to cheat me, are you? This is the thirteenth of December. Do you hear?"

the thirteenth, the date fixed and appointed by you, by your very self. You shall not evade your own appointment. Come, love, come.”

He took a few rapid steps forward, dragging her along with him, lifting her off her feet in his vehemence, but stopping suddenly when he found she was nearly falling.

“Geoffrey, how rough you are!”

“I didn’t mean to be rough. But there’s not a moment to lose. Why won’t you come?”

“I am not coming. It is sheer madness to talk of our wedding. You have been away for a whole month of your own accord. Our marriage has been put off indefinitely. Poor Geoffrey!” looking at his haggard face with sudden tenderness, “how dreadfully ill you look! worse than the night you arrived from Zanzibar. I will go back to the Manor with you, and see you safe and at rest with your dear mother.”

“No, no, I am never going back to the Manor where that dead man lies.”

“Dead ! Oh, God ! He is not dead ! What do you mean ?”

“I don’t want their dead man there. Well, he may be alive still, perhaps. I don’t want him there. His presence poisons my house, as his influence has poisoned my life. He has been a blight upon me. Like me, they say—like me, but of a different fibre. I know how to fight for my own hand. Will you come with me to the church quietly, of your own accord ?”

“No, no. Impossible.”

“Then I’ll make you,” he cried savagely, seizing her in his arms. “I won’t be fooled. I won’t be cheated. I am here to fulfil my part of the bond. I have not forgotten the date.”

Then with a swift change of mood he loosened his angry hold upon her, fell on his knees at her feet, crying over the poor little hand which he clasped in both his own.

“Pity me, Suzette, pity me ! I am the most miserable wretch in the world. I have been wandering about England like a criminal ; a

hateful country, no solitude, people staring and prying everywhere; a miserable overcrowded place where a man cannot be alone with his troubles, where there is no space for thought or memory. But I did not forget you. Your image was always there,” touching his forehead; *that* never faded. Only I forgot other things, or hardly knew which were dreams, or which were real. That grey afternoon in the wood, and the words that were said, and his face when I struck him! A dream? Yes, a dream! And then only yesterday the date upon a newspaper seen by accident—I have read no newspapers since I left Discombe—reminded me of to-day. I was at Padstow yesterday afternoon, an out-of-the-way village on the Cornish coast; and it has taken me all my time to get here to Discombe to-day in time to dress for my wedding. You should have seen my servant’s face when I rang for him. I went into the house by the old door in the lobby, and walked up to my dressing-room without meeting a mortal. One never does meet any one at Discombe.

The house is like the tomb of the Pharaohs—long passages, emptiness, silence.”

He had risen from his knees at Suzette’s entreaty, and was walking by her side, walking fast, speaking with breathless rapidity, eager, self-absorbed, holding her, lightly now, by the arm, as they paced the gravel walk.

“Higson was always a fool. I could see what he was thinking when I made him put out my frock-coat. The fellow thought I was mad. He wanted me to take a warm bath, and lie down for a bit before I saw my mother. He talked in the smooth wheedling way common people use with lunatics, as if they were children; and then he ran off to fetch my mother; and she came, poor soul, and kissed and cried over me, and thanked God with one breath for my return, and with the next wailed about Allan. Allan was there, close by, in my room. I was not to speak above my breath, lest I should disturb him. I went to another room to dress, but I had ever so much trouble with Higson before I could get

the things I wanted—London things he called them—and wouldn't I have this, or that, anything except what I asked for? So you see I had a lot of trouble, and then I walked to the church, and found it was two o'clock, and not a soul there.”

“Geoffrey, what could you expect?”

“I expected you to keep your word. This is our wedding-day. I expected to find my bride.”

“We must wait, Geoffrey. There is plenty of time.”

“No, there is no time. I want to take you with me to the Great Lake, far away from this cramped narrow country, these teeming over-crowded cities, a soil gridironed with railways, shut in with streets and houses, not one wide horizon like that inland sea. Ah, how you would adore it, as I do, in storm or in calm, always beautiful, always grand, a place made for the mind to grow in, for the heart to rest in. Ah, how often in the deep of the moonlight nights I have wandered up and down those smooth sands, thinking

of you, conjuring up your image in such warm reality that it froze my blood when I looked round and saw that the real woman was not at my side. You will go to Africa with me, Suzette ? ”

“ Yes, dear, yes ; by-and-by.”

“ Ah, that’s what Higson said when I told him to put out a frock-coat, ‘ By-and-by.’ But I answered with a ‘ Now ! ’ that made him jump. Hark ! there’s some one coming ; a step on the gravel.”

“ A light step, a girl’s quick footfall. It was the vicar’s daughter, fresh and blooming in winter frock and winter hat. A creature of the kind that is usually nailed flat on a barn door was coiled gracefully round the little felt hat, pretending to have come from Siberia.

At the first sight of Geoffrey, she started and looked aghast.

“ Mr. Wornock ! I thought you were hundreds of miles away.”

“ So I was, yesterday afternoon ; but I happened to remember my wedding-day, and

here I am, only to find that other people had forgotten.”

“Oh, you happened to remember!” said Bessie, still staring at the white waistcoat, the malmaison carnation, the light grey trousers stained with rain and mud from the knee downwards, and worst of all the haggard countenance of the wearer. “You only remembered yesterday. How funny!”

Miss Edgefield would have made the same remark about a funeral in her present startled condition of mind.

Matcham had plenty of stuff for conversation within the next few days; for by that subtle process by which facts or various versions of facts are circulated in a rustic neighbourhood, people became aware of Geoffrey Wornock's return to Discombe, and of dreadful scenes that had occurred at Marsh House, where he had stayed for a couple of days, during which period Suzette was living at the Grove under her aunt and uncle's protection.

Yes, there had been scenes, tragical scenes, at Marsh House. Mrs. Wornock had been hastily summoned there, and had stayed under General Vincent's roof till her unhappy son was removed in medical custody, whither Matcham people knew not, though there were positive assertions as to locality on the part of the more energetic talkers. A physician had been summoned from London, a man of repute in mental cases ; and Mrs. Wornock's brougham had driven away from Marsh House in wintry dusk, with a pair of horses, and had not returned to the Manor till late on the following day ; whereby it was concluded that the journey had been at least twenty miles.

Mr. Wornock had been taken away, placed under restraint, people told each other, arriving at the fact by the usual inductive process, and on this occasion unhappily accurate in their deduction. Geoffrey was in a doctor's care ; a madman with lucid intervals ; not violent, except in brief flashes of angry despair, but with occasional hallucinations, that delirium

without fever which constitutes lunacy from the standpoint of law and medicine.

Before he passed into that dim under-world of the private lunatic asylum, he had, in more than one wild torrent of self-accusation, confessed his treacherous desertion of Allan in Africa, his savage assault upon Allan in the wood. They had met, and Allan had upbraided him for that treacherous desertion, and for stealing his sweetheart. Suzette's name had been like a lighted fuse to an infernal machine; and then the latent savage which is in every man had leapt into life, and there had been a deadly struggle, a fight for existence on Allan's part, a murderous onslaught from Geoffrey.

It needed not the opinion of the detective police, nor yet the discovery of Allan's watch and signet-ring under the rotten leaves in the deep hollow of an old oak half a mile from the spot where he himself had been found, to substantiate Geoffrey's self-accusation. His unhappy mother, who was with him at Marsh House throughout those last dreadful hours of

raving and unrest, had never doubted his guilt from the time of his reappearance at Discombe.

It was months before Allan returned to the world of active life ; but he left the Manor long before actual convalescence.

Not once, during those slow hours of returning health, did he allude to the cause of his terrible illness ; and, on his mother timidly questioning him, he professed to have no recollection of the assault which had been so nearly fatal.

“Let the past remain a blank, mother. No good can come by trying to remember.”

He was especially gentle and affectionate to Mrs. Wornock on her rare visits to his room during the earlier stages of his convalescence. Geoffrey’s name was not spoken by either ; but Allan’s sympathetic manner told the unhappy mother that he knew her grief and pitied her.

Lady Emily was by no means ungrateful for the lavish hospitality with which Mrs. Wornock’s house and household had been devoted

to her son, yet she shrank with a natural abhorrence from a scene which was associated with Allan's peril and Geoffrey's crime. No kindness of Mrs. Wornock's could lessen that horror; and Lady Emily did her utmost to hasten the patient's removal to his own house, short of risking a relapse. When she saw him established in his cheerful bedchamber at Beechhurst, she felt as if she had taken him out of a charnel-house into the pleasant world of the living and the happy; a world to which Geoffrey Wornock was fated never to return.

“Quite hopeless,” was the verdict of medical authority.

Mrs. Wornock left Discombe, and was said to be living in complete seclusion, attended upon by two or three of the oldest of the Manor servants, in a cottage near the private asylum where her son was a prisoner for life.

Before midsummer Allan's health was completely restored, and mother and son left for Suffolk, for the pastures and pine-woods, the

long white roads and sandy commons, the wide horizons and large level spaces flooded with the red and gold of sunsets that are said to surpass the splendour of sunsets in more picturesque scenery. Lady Emily would have been completely happy in this quiet interlude, this tranquil pause in the drama of life, had not Allan talked of going back to Africa before the end of the year.

“Why not?” he asked, when she remonstrated with him. “There is nothing for me to do in England, and Africa doesn’t mean a lifelong separation, mother, or I would not dream of going there. Every year shortens the journey. Six weeks, I think Consul Johnstone called it, to Lake Tanganyika. If I go, I promise to return in less than two years. You would hardly have time to miss me in your busy days here——”

“Busy about such poor trifles, Allan? Do you think my farm could fill the place of my son? If you were away, one great care and sorrow would fill every hour of my life. And

think what an anxious winter I went through—a season of fear and trembling.”

This plea prevailed. He could not disregard the care and love that had been lavished upon him. No, he would not allow himself to be drawn back to that dark continent which is said to exercise a subtle influence over those who have once crossed her far-reaching plains, and rested beside her wide waters, and lived her life of adventure and surprise. No, it was too soon for the son to leave his mother, she having none but him. He had done with love; but duty still claimed him; and he stayed.

A quiet winter at Beechhurst, with his mother to keep house for him, a good deal of hunting, and so much attention and kindly feeling from everybody in the neighbourhood, that he could not altogether play the hermit. He was forced into visiting, and into entertaining his friends, and Lady Emily was very happy in playing her part of hostess in the livelier circle of Matcham, while the shutters were closed at Fendyke, and the bailiff had full sway on the white farm,

allowed to do what he liked there, which was generally something different from what his mistress liked.

Life was made easier for Allan that winter by the absence of Suzette, who was travelling with her father—easier, and emptier, for the one presence which would have given a zest to life was wanting. He told himself that it was better so, better for his peace, since she could never be anything to him. The disappearance of his rival would make no difference in her feelings for Allan; for no doubt her affection for Geoffrey would only be strengthened by their tragical separation and her lover's miserable fate.

“If she should ever care for any one else, it will be a stranger,” Allan told himself in those long reveries which the mere sight of a well-known garden wall, or the chimneys of Marsh House seen above the leafless elms as he rode past, could evoke. “She will never waste a thought upon me.”

Other people were more hopeful. Mrs.

Mornington told her friends in confidence that her niece's acceptance of that unfortunate young man had been a folly, into which she had been entrapped by Geoffrey's dominant temper, and by her passion for music.

“She never loved that unhappy young man as she once loved Allan Carew.”

“And now, no doubt, she and Mr. Carew will make it up and marry,” said the confidant, male or female, as the case might be.

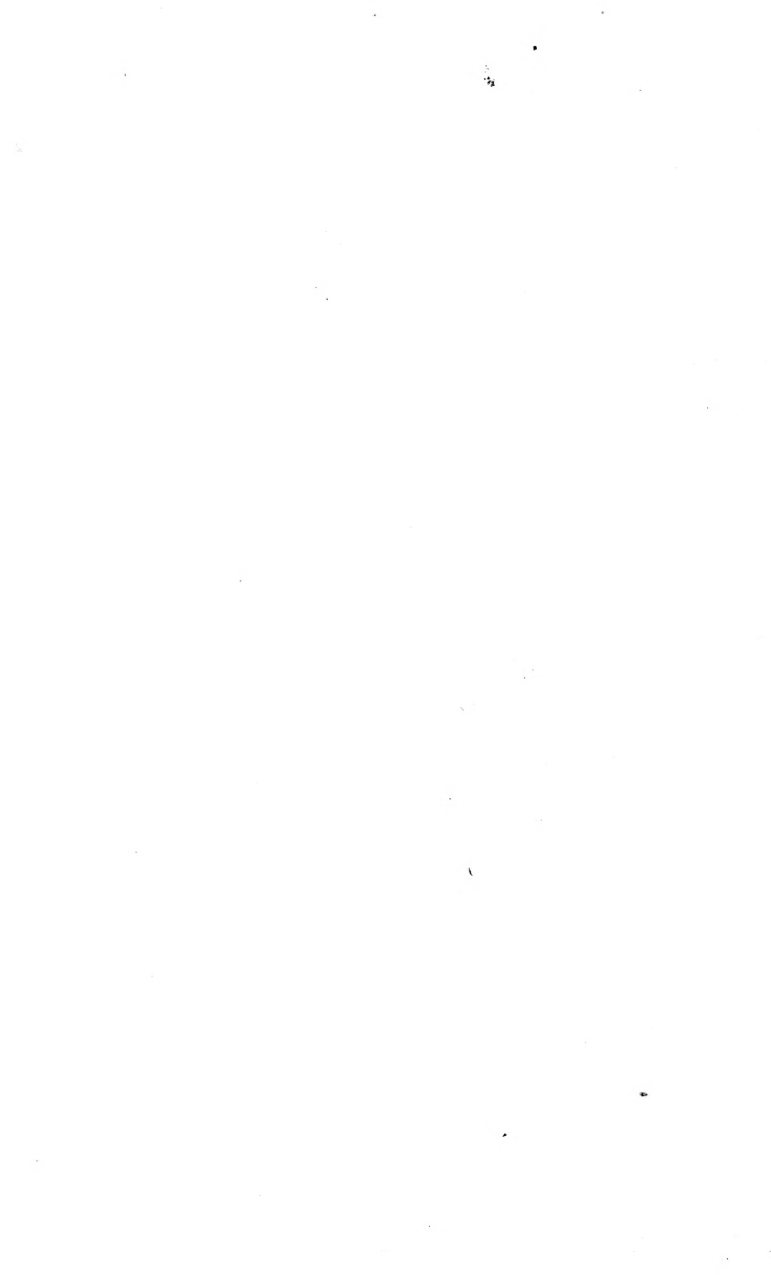
“Not now: but some day, yes, perhaps,” replied Suzette's aunt, with a significant nod.

And the day came—when Geoffrey Wornock's passionate heart was still for ever—had been stilled for more than two years—and when to him, at rest in the silence of the family burial-place at Discombe, by the side of the mother who had only survived him by a few weeks, the sound of Suzette's wedding-bells, the knowledge of Allan's happiness could bring no pain.

Allan's day came—long and late, after years of patient waiting, when Suzette had attained the sober age of six and twenty; but it was a

day of cloudless happiness, which promised to last to the end of life. No fear of the future marred the joy of the present. The later love that had grown up in Suzette's heart for her first lover, was too strongly based upon knowledge and esteem to suffer the shadow of change.

THE END.



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